Al-Mīzān

An Exegesis of the Qur'an

ʿAllāmah al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī

Translated by: Alexander Khaleeli

Volume 20
First Edition (2023)

Tawheed Institute Australia Ltd.
Sydney, Australia
www.tawheed.com.au

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English translation
First Edition 1444/2023

Translated from the original Arabic titled: *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* as published by Mu'assasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī al-Ṭāb'iah li-Jamā'at al-Mudarrisīn fī al-Ḥawzah al-'Ilmiyyah fī Qumm al-Muqaddasah, 1417 AH (vol. 10).

Published by Tawheed Institute Australia Ltd.
Sydney, Australia
www.tawheed.com.au

In the Name of Allah,
the Beneficent, the Merciful.

All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds;
the Beneficent, the Merciful;
the Master of the Day of Judgment;
Thee only we serve, and to Thee alone we beseech
for help;
Guide us in the straight path;
The path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed
favors,not of those against whom Thou art
wrathful, nor of those who are astray.

•

O' Allah! send Your blessings to the head of
Your messengers and the last of
Your prophets,
Muḥammad and his pure and cleansed progeny.
Also send Your blessings to all Your
prophets and envoys.

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Arabic Transliteration Key

Arabic Letters	Transliteration	Arabic Letters	Transliteration
ا	ā	ع	ʿ
ب	b	غ	gh
ت	t	ف	f
ث	th	ق	q
ج	j	ك	k
ح	ḥ	ل	l
خ	kh	م	m
د	d	ن	n
ذ	dh	ه	h
ر	r	و	w/ū
ز	z	ى	y/ī
س	s	ء	ʾ
ش	sh	ة	ah
ص	ṣ	ـَ	a
ض	ḍ	ـَ	i
ط	ṭ	ـُ	u
ظ	ẓ		

Publisher's Note

In an effort to make the text more accessible to English-speaking readers, the editors have chosen to use English names for the prophets and figures (as listed below but not limited to) and to use Anglicized terms that now appear in English dictionaries.

Ādam	Adam	Mūsā	Moses
Dāwūd	David	Sulaymān	Solomon
Hārūn	Aaron	Shuʿayb	Jethro
Ibrāhīm	Abraham	Yaʿqūb	Jacob
ʿĪsā	Jesus	ʾAyyūb	Job
Isḥāq	Isaac	Yūnus	Jonah
Ismāʿīl	Ishmael	Yūsuf	Joseph
Jibrāʾīl	Gabriel	Zakariyyā	Zachariah
Lūt	Lot	ʿUzayr	Ezra

Arabic terms and names have been transliterated according to the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (*IJMES*).

For ease of reading, glyphs and traditional honorifics such as "peace be upon him" or which are commonly used as a gesture of respect after the name of the Prophet Muhammad, the Imāms, or other sacred figures have been omitted from this text. No disrespect is intended, and may God's peace and blessings be upon them all!

Foreword

This volume features ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī's commentary on the entirety Sūrah Yūnus and the first section of Sūrah Hūd. The introductions to other volumes in this series have already discussed the author's intellectual biography and his approach to Qurʾanic exegesis. The present introduction will focus on the commentary on Sūrah Yūnus (leaving Sūrah Hūd for the subsequent volume) and its principle themes.

Chapter 10 (Yūnus, 'Jonah') takes its name from the Prophet Jonah, whose story is referenced in a single verse towards its end, along with the stories of Noah and Moses. At first glance, this choice of name may seem surprising for two reasons; first, because the story occupies only a single verse (by comparison, the story of Noah occupies three verses, and the story of Moses eighteen) and, secondly, because the story of Jonah is described in greater detail in Sūrah al-Ṣāffāt (37:139–148). However, in fact, the reference to Jonah plays a pivotal role in the chapter's overall message. Therefore, we will consider it in the broader context of the chapter, while considering the significance of the story of Jonah amongst other Qurʾanic narratives of earlier prophets.

Sūrah Yūnus was revealed in Mecca and, as ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī has observed that, based on interconnectedness of its verses, it was sent down in a single go. As such, it provides us with an example of how the Qurʾan draws on a range of devices to convey its message, and particularly the use of narrative.

The tone of the chapter is highly dialectical: We frequently hear the voices of the Prophet's opponents related in its verses as God recounts them, *They say...* (10:2, 15, 18, 20, 38, 48, 68) or *They inquire of you ...* (10:53), before instructing His Messenger on how to respond, with the imperative, *say...* (10:15, 16, 18, 20, 21, 31, 34, 38, 41, 49, 50, 53, 58, 59, 69), and frequently directly addressing the audience (with the plural 'you'), for example: *What is the matter with you? How do you judge?* (10:35).

Throughout this chapter, God returns time and again to the issue of the revelation of the Qurʾan and the Meccans' denial thereof. It appears as though it was revealed after the idolaters had rejected the Prophet's claim

to receive divine revelation and denounced the Qur'an as nothing more than magic. Therefore, the bulk of this discussion of this chapter revolves around threats of punishment against those of the Prophet's people who deny God's signs, and a warning that He will judge between the Prophet and between them, and that this is God's convention in dealing with His creatures, after which He concludes the chapter. This is one of the distinguishing features of the chapter, and it is in this context that the stories of Jonah, Noah, and Moses should be understood.

In verses 47–52, God sets up a universal historical paradigm of how people deny His prophets and, as a result, fall victim to His wrath: *There is a messenger for every nation; so when their messenger comes, judgement is made between them with justice, and they are not wronged* (10:47). This is the principle that is shown to operate in the stories of Noah, Moses, and Jonah later in the chapter—whose missions are set up as parallels to that of the Prophet—and it is to this principle that God ultimately returns at the end of the chapter.

The Qur'an contains numerous accounts of nations that have been punished by God, particularly the stories of other prophets such as Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Lot, and Shuʿayb. These stories recount the unbelieving response of a particular people to one of God's prophets when he called on them to be god-fearing and righteous; their response often includes a threat of violence towards the prophet in question, who then prays for God to deliver him and his followers or household. Then, in a variety of ways, God intervenes to destroy the disbelievers. Therefore, the basic structure of these stories is that God sends a messenger; the messenger is rejected; and the unbelievers are punished.

These punishment stories are of further interest, however, because they provide some fascinating insights into the Prophet's own experience in Mecca, as they are evidently intended to console him that he is not alone amongst the divine messengers in being rejected by his own people. Therefore, paradoxically, these stories about divine punishment reflect his deep concern for the Meccan idolaters and the grief that their disbelief causes him.

The present chapter clearly intends to draw a parallel between the mission of Moses to Pharaoh and the of Prophet to his people. We see the Meccan disbelievers of the Prophet's time saying in 10:2: *'This is indeed*

a plain magician', while Pharaoh and his elite respond to Moses' call by denouncing it as: *'This is indeed plain magic!'* (10:76). Furthermore, Moses answer to Pharaoh could apply equally well to the people of Mecca: *'Do you say of the truth when it comes to you...? Is this magic? Magicians do not find salvation'* (10:77). These parallels serve to highlight both the fundamental unity and continuity of the divine message throughout history, as well as the predictability of the responses of its opponents. This establishes God's custom (*sunnah*) of dealing with mankind and reassures the faithful at the time of the Prophet that the attitude of the Quraysh is not only not unprecedented but to be expected. The further implication of this is that if the Quraysh do not alter their ways, they will suffer the same fate as Pharaoh and the people of Noah. This point is driven home by the exceptional case of Jonah, to which we will now turn.

Jonah's nation is unique amongst all the nations mentioned in the Qur'an in that they were the only people to have escaped divine punishment through repentance—in contrast to the people of Noah and Pharaoh and his elite:

> *Why has there not been any town that might believe, so that its belief might benefit it, except the people of Jonah? When they believed, We removed from them the punishment of disgrace in the life of this world, and We provided for them for a while* (10:90).

Jonah's people provide an example of hope and the possibility of deliverance, almost to the last minute—contrast this to the story of Pharaoh, who left his repentance too late:

> *We carried the Children of Israel across the sea, whereat Pharaoh and his troops pursued them out of defiance and aggression. When overtaken by drowning, he called out, 'I believe that there is no god except Him in whom the Children of Israel believe, and I am one of those who submit.' 'What! Now? When you have been disobedient heretofore and were among the agents of corruption?!* (10:90–91).

The message of this juxtaposition could not have been lost on the Prophet's audience: As long as the punishment has not yet overtaken you, there is still time to repent—It is ultimately a hopeful message, although one accompanied by a dire warning of what would follow should they fail to do so.

The story of Jonah is fleshed out in more detail in other chapters of the Qur'an, whose details raise interesting theological problems for Muslim theologians. However, the key detail that is mentioned here is the fact that his people were spared God's punishment; it is this detail that separate his story from the other two presented before it, and which provides the key to not only the significance of the three prophetic narratives, but to the chapter as a whole. Recall that the central theme of this chapter has been the rejection of the Quraysh of the Prophet and his revelation, which finds historical parallels in the stories of these three messengers. God makes this parallel explicit towards the end of the chapter:

> *Do they await anything except the like of the days of those who passed away before them? Say, 'Then wait! I too am waiting along with you.' Then We shall deliver Our apostles and those who have faith. Thus it is a must for Us to deliver the faithful* (10:102–103).

The final verses of the chapter harken back to the judgement mentioned in 10:47. Having provided three examples of His judgement of earlier nations (including the exceptional case of Jonah), God now reassures the Prophet that just as He judged between earlier prophets and their nations, so too shall he judge between the Prophet and his own when the time comes:

> *And follow that which is revealed to you, and be patient until Allah issues judgement, and He is the best of judges* (10:108–109).

Alexander Khaleeli (Translator),
August, 2023

Chapter 11

Sūrah Hūd

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بِسۡمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate

Verses 25-35

This section of verses begins with the stories of the prophets, starting with Noah and followed by a group including Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Abraham, Lot, Jethro (Shuʿayb), and Moses. The story of Noah is divided into sections, the first of which covers his arguments with his people about monotheism. As noted by God Almighty in His Book, Noah is one of the first prophets to preach monotheism in the face of idolatry. Most of Noah's debates with his people are presented in the best possible manner, some in the form of moral exhortations, and a few from the perspective of logical arguments. This suits the thinking of early humans and the simple, ancient man, particularly their social thought, which only displays the thinking of individuals of average intelligence.

وَلَقَدۡ أَرۡسَلۡنَا نُوحًا إِلَىٰ قَوۡمِهِۦٓ إِنِّي لَكُمۡ نَذِيرٞ مُّبِينٌ ٢٥

(11:25) *Certainly We sent Noah to his people: 'Indeed* (innī) *I am a manifest warner to you ...'*

The common recitation of this verse uses the preposition *innī*, assuming that this represents the beginning of a statement by Noah. A variant recitation is *annī*, with the implicit meaning *bi-annī*.

In any case, the sentence, *Certainly We sent Noah to his people: 'Indeed I am a manifest warner to you ...'* is a general exposition of Noah's message, as everything he conveyed to his people on behalf of his Lord was a manifest warning, so he is a manifest warner.

If he were to say, 'Whatever I communicate to you in words is a clear warning,' this would be a summary of the entirety of his mission, expressed in the most succinct form. The same is true of his saying, '*Indeed I am a manifest warner to you.*' However, while this also summarizes his mission, it actually goes further than the previous statement by clarifying his role—that he is a messenger from God to warn his people of God's punishment, and he is nothing more than an intermediary carrying the message.

أَنْ لَا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا اللَّهَ ۖ إِنِّي أَخَافُ عَلَيْكُمْ عَذَابَ يَوْمٍ أَلِيمٍ ﴿٢٦﴾

(11:26) *'... Worship none but Allah. Indeed I fear for you the punishment of a painful day.'*

This is another explanation of his mission, or an exposition of his previous statement saying, *Indeed I am a manifest warner to you*. Both explanations lead to the same point, namely to clarify the nature of his mission, which was to prohibit the worship of anyone other than God through warnings and intimidations.

Some commentators have suggested that the phrase, *Worship none but Allah*, serves as a substitution (*badal*) for his statement, *Indeed I am a manifest warner to you*, or it may be seen as the object of his clear warning. However, the context supports the interpretation we have previously provided.

It appears that *the punishment of a painful day* refers to the punishment of divine extermination rather than the punishment that awaits on the Day of Resurrection, or it could refer to divine punishment in general. This interpretation is supported by their response to him, which appears below: *They said, 'O Noah, you have disputed with us already, and you have disputed with us exceedingly. Now bring us what you threaten us with should you be truthful. He said, 'Allah will indeed bring it on you if He wishes, and you cannot thwart* (11:32–33).

Thus, Noah called on them to renounce idol worship and warned them of a painful punishment from God. This pain is attributed to the day rather than the punishment in the phrase *the punishment of a painful day*—this is describing the context in place of the events that take place in it.

Given the above, we can reject the claim that the punishment of the polytheists is predestined and inevitable, so why would Noah fear an

inevitable punishment? Fear is only reasonable in situations where the occurrence is possible, not inevitable.

In summary, Noah was calling them to monotheism by instilling a fear of divine punishment. He warned them of this because they worshipped idols out of fear of their wrath. Noah confronted them with the fact that it is God Almighty—and not their false deities—who created them, directed their lives, and looked after their affairs by creating the heavens and the earth, making the sun and moon shine, sending rain, causing the earth to sprout vegetation, creating gardens, and dividing rivers, as God tells us in Sūrah Nūḥ.

Given this reality, God Almighty is their Lord and there is no other Lord besides Him. Therefore, they should only fear His punishment and worship Him alone.

In truth, this argument is a demonstrative one based on certainty, but they received it as a speculative argument based on conjecture. Due to their naive understanding, they expected God's wrath and punishment for disobedience because they saw Him as a master of their affairs, who took care of their interests. They compared His will with that of human masters in their own society, who demanded respect and compliance. If anyone resisted these earthly masters and refused to comply, they would be subjected to their wrath and punishment for their transgressions and rebelliousness.

According to this argument, it is necessary to please the Lord or the lords who govern the affairs of the universe and administer the cosmic order. It becomes essential to satisfy them and extinguish the fires of their wrath through submitting to them and propitiating them through offerings, sacrifices, and other forms of worship. Such was their belief, which was grounded in conjecture.

However, the matter of divine punishment befalling those who reject the worship of God and arrogantly resist submitting to His Lordship is a matter of reality and certitude. One of the universal principles operating in the universe is the need of the weak to submit to the strong and the oppressed to the oppressor. What then can be said about God, the One, the Overpowering, to whom the destiny of all matters devolves?

God Almighty created the different parts of the universe and interconnected them, then He events in motion according to the system of cause

and effect. On this basis, everything operates within an existential order. Therefore, if anything deviates from the path outlined by the rest of the causes, this leads to a disruption of the cosmic order and represents a challenge to it. In such a situation, all the cosmic causes rise from the different parts of existence to rectify its course and bring it back to a path that befits them, thus warding off harm to themselves. If this deviant part corrects its course, it survives; otherwise, it is crushed by the general causes and gripped by misfortunes and calamities. This too is a universal principle.

Now, the human being is a part of the universe, and he has a life course outlined for him by virtue of his creation and origination. If he follows the path that has been laid out for him, it leads him to his happiness and puts him in alignment with the rest of the universe. The heavens open their doors to him and shower him with blessings and the earth yields its treasures of goodness. This is Islam, the religion appointed by God Almighty for humankind, and it is the faith which Noah called people to through his message and, after him, all the prophets and messengers.

If a person deviates and strays from this path, he challenges the cosmic order and the different parts of existence that make up the universe, encroaching on their affairs. In such a case, he should anticipate the bitterness of calamities and expect punishment and suffering to result. If he rectifies his course and submits to the will of God, which shields him from the general causes of destruction, it is hoped that these blessings will return to him after he has suffered adversities. Otherwise, only destruction and annihilation await him, and indeed God is self-sufficient, needing nothing from the worlds. This discussion has been addressed in some parts of the previous chapters.

فَقَالَ الْمَلَأُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ قَوْمِهِ مَا نَرَاكَ إِلَّا بَشَرًا مِثْلَنَا وَمَا نَرَاكَ اتَّبَعَكَ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ هُمْ أَرَاذِلُنَا بَادِيَ الرَّأْيِ وَمَا نَرَىٰ لَكُمْ عَلَيْنَا مِنْ فَضْلٍ بَلْ نَظُنُّكُمْ كَاذِبِينَ ﴿٢٧﴾

(11:27) *But* (fa) *the elite of the faithless from among his people said, 'We do not see you to be anything but a human being like ourselves, and we do not see anyone following you except those who are simpleminded riffraff from our midst. Nor do we see that you have any merit over us. Rather we consider you to be liars.'*

The preposition *fa* (but) at the beginning of the verse serves to distinguish their response from Noah's statement and indicates that they rejected and denied his message in haste without contemplating what would be most beneficial for them.

Those who responded to Noah were the eminent, nobles, and worthies from among his own people who disbelieved in him. However, in their response, they did not address the argument he presented to them to make the case for monotheism. Instead, they focused on denying his prophethood and arrogantly refusing to obey him. His saying, *Indeed I am a manifest warner to you, ...* was a claim of prophethood and, as such, implied that they were morally obliged to follow him. He clarified this in another place, as God said, *'O my people! Indeed I am a manifest warner to you. Worship Allah and be wary of Him, and obey me'* (71:3).

The essence of their response, as conveyed by God in the Qur'an, is that there is no evidence to necessitate following him and that rather, the evidence suggests the contrary. Thus, in truth, there are two arguments they deploy in their dispute with Noah. That is why they concluded their rebuttal by saying, '*Rather we consider you to be liars*.'

The first argument they make is that there is no evidence to oblige them to follow him. This is laid out through three statements: their saying, '*We do not see you to be anything but a human being like ourselves ...*'; their saying, '*and we do not see anyone following you except those who are simpleminded riffraff from our midst ...*'; and their saying, '*Nor do we see that you have any merit over us ...*'

The argument, with all its parts, is premised on a rejection of anything that is beyond the perception of the senses, as we will clarify. This is why they repeat the verb, '*see*' in each of these statements.

When they say, *We do not see you to be anything but a human being like ourselves ...*, this is their first response to Noah's claim of prophethood. They held fast to this argument, as was the habit of all nations with their prophets, according to what God has narrated in His Book, namely: 'You are a human being like us. If you were truly a messenger from God, you would not be so. We see you only as human like us. Therefore, since you are a human like us, there is no obligation to follow you.'

This statement denies his prophethood by asserting that he is nothing but a man like them, and then concluding from that, there is no reason

for them to follow him. The evidence for this is Noah's own statement, as God Almighty relates: *O my people! Tell me, should I stand on a manifest proof from my Lord …*

This matter has been a subject of confusion for some commentators. They understood the statement, *We do not see you to be anything but a human being like ourselves …*, as them equating him with themselves in terms of social standing and, hence, concluding that they had no reason to follow him. One commentator explained the verse saying that Noah's people countered with four potent arguments. One of these was that he was a man just like them, thus they levelled him with themselves in general terms. This indicates that Noah was of their social class or close to it in his household and in his person, as was the case with every messenger from among his people. The thrust of the argument is that his equality with them negates the claim of superiority of one equal over another, making one a submissive follower and the other a followed leader, because this would be an arbitrary preference.

However, if the verse meant what these commentators claimed it did, it would have been more fitting for Noah's people to say, 'you are like us,' or 'we see you as one of us', rather than saying, *We do not see you to be anything but a human being like ourselves*. There would be no reason to explicitly call attention to his humanity as we observe in the verse. Furthermore, this statement would mean the same as *Nor do we see that you have any merit over us*, which would make the first statement redundant.

It is strange that these commentators understood the statement, *We do not see you to be anything but a human being like ourselves*, to be an affirmation of their equality with him in terms of his person and family, and then added that 'this was the state of every messenger among their own people', when this includes the likes of Abraham, Solomon, and Job.

As for when they say, *and we do not see anyone following you except those who are simpleminded riffraff* (arādhilunā) *from our midst*, al-Rāghib says:

> '*Radhl* ('low', 'base'), *ridhl* refer to what is undesirable due to its innate inferiority. This is seen in God's saying, *… and there are some among you who are relegated to the nethermost age …* (16:70); *and we do not see anyone following you except those who are simpleminded riffraff*; and *They said, 'Shall we believe in you, when it is the riffraff who follow you?'* (26:111). The plural of *radhl* is *aradhil*.'

In the book *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, al-Ṭabrisī says:

> '*Radhal* means base and despicable from every aspect. The plural is *aradhil*, and the pluplural is *arādhil*, in the same way as *kalb* ('dog') is made plural first as *aklab* ('dogs'), then *akālīb* ('many dogs'). It is also possible that *ardhal* ('lowest') can be pluralised as *arādhil*, in the same way as *akābir* is the plural of *akbar* ('greatest').'

He also says:

> 'The word *raʾy* in *bādī al-raʾy* ('*simpleminded*'), literally means 'sight' (*ruʾya*), as per the verse, *who saw them visibly twice as many* (3:13), meaning with their eyes.'

In his *al-Mufradāt*, al-Rāghib said:

> '*bādī al-raʾy* ('simpleminded') refers to a person's first thoughts on a matter. It can also mean to give opinions without thinking.'

The phrase *bādī al-raʾy* could be a qualifier of *those who are ... riffraff* (arādhil), meaning that they appear to be the lowest of us at first glance.

It could also be understood as a qualifier to the statement, *anyone following you*, meaning: 'they follow you based on initial impressions without deep reflection. If they reflected even a little and thoroughly examined your affair, they would not have followed you.' However, this reading requires the introduction of a second, implicit, verb, namely, 'they <u>follow you</u> at first glance.' If this second verb is not introduced, then the meaning becomes disordered. It is also said to mean, 'We do not see you being followed at first glance except by these who are lowest.' In short, the meaning of the verse is: 'We see that your followers are the lowest and basest members of the people, and if we followed you would make us like them, and we will be counted among them. This would deprive us of our dignity and our power in society.' This statement contains an implicit denial of his prophethood, since it is a common belief that if such a claim were true and beneficial, it would be followed by the great and good of society—those who hold power and authority. If they disdained it or if it were only followed by the lowly and weak, such as the slaves, the poor, and the needy who possess neither wealth nor prestige, nor any status among the common folk, then there is no good in it.

Their statement, *Nor do we see that you have any merit over us*, aims to deny that he enjoys any kind of superiority over them, whether in terms of

worldly possessions that they benefit from or something of the Unseen, such as knowledge of the Unseen or being supported with a supernatural force. This is due to the indefinite noun 'merit' (*faḍl*) occurring in the context of a negation, hence, implying generality.

They associated Noah's followers and those among them who believed in him with his mission when they said *Nor do we see that you* (plural) *have any merit over us*, instead of saying, 'Nor do we see that you (singular) have any merit ...' This is because they were encouraging them to follow the path they had chosen for themselves.

The meaning here is that your calling to us—while we enjoy the perks of worldly life such as wealth, children, knowledge, and power—would only be justified and have an impact if you had some advantage that you could bestow upon us, whether it is from the beauties of this worldly life, knowledge of the Unseen, or supernatural power that would make us submit to you. We do not see anything like this with you, so what would compel us to follow you?

We read 'merit' (*faḍl*) in a general sense that encompasses both material aspects and metaphysical ones, such as knowledge of the Unseen and supernatural power. This reading differs from the majority of commentators, who tend to limit '*merit*' to material wealth and abundance, given the broad implication that can be inferred from their discourse because it occurs in the context of a negation.

This is in addition to the fact that Noah's response to their statement hints at this broader meaning, *I do not say to you that I possess the treasuries of Allah, neither do I know the Unseen. I do not claim to be an angel ...* (11:31).

The statement, *Rather we consider you to be liars* draws a conclusion to their argument, as we have previously discussed. The upshot is that we see no valid reason to follow you, but there is a valid reason not to follow you, we believe you are lying.

Based on the context of the verse, the meaning is: 'Because you lack evidence supporting your claims and keep pressing us to listen and obey, yet you lack life's advantages such as wealth and prestige, it would be reasonable to suspect that you are lying about your mission. You might be seeking to attain what we possess in life through this means. Overall, these indicators typically suggest a falsehood used to gain wealth, seize people's property, and assert authority over them through ruling and leadership.

This is demonstrated by God's narration of their account, as seen in Sūrah al-Mu'minūn: *But the elite of the faithless from among his people said, 'This is just a human being like you, who seeks to gain an advantage over you ...'* (23:24). This explains why they suspect him of lying rather than believing it with certainty.

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قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُ عَلَىٰ بَيِّنَةٍ مِنْ رَبِّي وَآتَانِي رَحْمَةً مِنْ عِنْدِهِ فَعُمِّيَتْ عَلَيْكُمْ أَنُلْزِمُكُمُوهَا وَأَنْتُمْ لَهَا كَارِهُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾

(11:28) *He said, 'O my people! Tell me, should I stand on a manifest proof from my Lord, and He has granted me His own mercy—though it should be invisible to you—shall we force it upon you while you are averse to it?*

In this and in the following four verses, Noah articulates his response to their argument. The phrase, *though it should be invisible to you*, implies it has been hidden due to their own ignorance and aversion to the truth. In another reading, *though it should be invisible to you*, means that God's mercy has been hidden from you.

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Given that their argument was based on their physical senses and their denial of the metaphysical, from which they first inferred the absence of any evidence that they should follow and obey him. Then, they went a step further to argue that there was evidence that they did not need to follow him, or even that they were obliged not to follow him. In response, Noah affirmed his prophethood and its implications, which they sought to reject. He also rejected their accusation of lying that they made towards him and his followers. However, at the same time, he entreated them by repeatedly addressing them as '*my people*' in order to draw them closer, hoping that his advice would be accepted by them.

The noble verses have excelled in laying out Prophet Noah's argument in response to them, in which he dismantled their arguments piece by piece. Each segment of their argument was addressed from two aspects: their claim of lack of evidence supporting the obligation to follow him and the supposed evidence contradicting it. This can be seen in his responses, '*O my people! Tell me, should I stand on a manifest proof from my Lord...*'; '*But I will not drive away those who have faith...*'; '*I do not say to you that I possess the treasuries of Allah...*'

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The verses then proceed to summarize each of the three arguments and incorporate them into the subsequent argument, interweaving one with the next, each being distinct and complete in its own right. Thus, the arguments are presented threefold, each initiated with an address, such as: '*O my people! Tell me, should I stand on a manifest proof …*' ; '*O my people! I do not ask you any material reward for it …*', and, '*O my people! Who would come to my help against Allah were I to drive them away …*'. These are worth further consideration.

He said, 'O my people! Tell me, should I stand on a manifest proof from my Lord, and He has granted me His own mercy: This is a response to their statement, '*We do not see you to be anything but a human being like ourselves …*', by which they meant that he had nothing but his humanity, in which he resembled them. Therefore, what right does he have to claim that people should follow him? They accused him of lying and trying to use his claim of prophethood to seize their wealth and attain a position of leadership over them.

Given that they deny his prophethood based on the fact that he was a mere human, without any apparent signs of prophethood or connection to the Unseen, it was necessary to remind them of the miraculous signs (verses) that confirmed his claim of prophethood. Prophethood is kind of a supernatural connection to the Unseen, and its authenticity can only be verified through the manifestation of another supernatural event that confirms the truthfulness of the prophet's claim. This is why Noah said, *'O my people! Tell me, should I stand on a manifest proof from my Lord…'*, indicating that he has clear evidence from God and a miraculous sign that attests to his claim.

From this perspective, it becomes clear that 'manifest proof' (*bayyina*) refers to a miraculous sign which proves the validity of his prophethood, as this is what fits with the context. Thus, the interpretations of some commentators suggesting that '*manifest proof*' in this verse refers to intuitive knowledge, by which the prophet knows that he is a prophet, can be disregarded as it does not match the context of the verse.

…and He has granted me His own mercy—though it should be invisible to you: This ostensibly refers to what God has bestowed upon Noah in terms of scripture and knowledge. The Qur'an repeatedly refers to scripture, as well as God's knowledge and signs, as a 'mercy' (*raḥma*). For

example, previously in this chapter, God said, *And before him there was the Book of Moses, a guide and mercy* (11:17). He also says, *We have sent down the Book to you as a clarification of all things and as a guidance and a mercy …* (16:89), and, *they found one of Our servants whom We had granted a mercy from Ourselves* (18:65), and, *'Our Lord! Do not make our hearts swerve after You have guided us, and bestow Your mercy on us.'* (3:8).

As for his saying, *though it should be invisible to you*, '*it*' apparently refers to God's mercy, meaning that their ignorance and their aversion to the truth has hidden from them the knowledge and understanding that he possesses, even though he has informed them about it and has spread it amongst them.

When he says, *shall we force it upon you* (nulzimu-kumū-hā) *while you are averse to it?*—The verb *ilzām* (from whence *nuzlimu* is derived) means to attach one thing to another in a way that makes it inseparable from it. This means to impose God's mercy upon them while they are averse to it by compelling them to believe in God and His signs, and embodying the qualities of enlightenment and insight that divine knowledge requires.

Therefore, the meaning of the verse is: 'Tell me, if I have a miraculous sign that verifies my message, despite being a human like you, and I possess the knowledge and scripture necessary to guide you to the truth with my message. However, due to your stubbornness and arrogance, this was quickly concealed from you. So, should we then compel you to it?' In other words, I have all that a messenger of God needs for his message, and I have informed you about it, but you do not believe in it out of sinfulness and arrogance. I am not required to force you to believe in it, as there is no compulsion in the religion of God Almighty.

This statement implies that the argument has been decisively completed for them and the truth has been revealed, but they still refuse to believe. However, they still demand some reason to believe, but in reality this is tantamount to compulsion and forcing them to believe against their will. This is because, when they said, *We do not see you to be anything but a human being like ourselves*, this shows that they are looking for something to compel them to believe, and there is no compulsion in the religion of God.

This is one of the verses in the Qur'an that negate any coercion or compulsion from religion, showing that this was one of the first ordinances

to be legislated in the earliest iterations of the divine law—the code of Noah—and that it still stands today without ever having been abrogated.

Based on the above, it is clear that when Noah said, '*O my people! Tell me, should I stand on a manifest proof from my Lord...*', it was a response to their argument, '*We do not see you to be anything but a human being like ourselves*.' This exposes the error of those commentators who claim that it is a response to their statement, '*Rather we consider you to be liars*', or those who claim it is a response to their argument, '*and we do not see anyone following you except those who are simpleminded riffraff from our midst*', or the view of yet another group of commentators who say that it answers their argument, '*Nor do we see that you have any merit over us.*' Therefore, we will not allow the discussion to become overly long by explaining and refuting these views.

وَيَا قَوْمِ لَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ مَالًا ۖ إِنْ أَجْرِيَ إِلَّا عَلَى اللَّهِ ۚ وَمَا أَنَا بِطَارِدِ
الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا ۚ إِنَّهُمْ مُلَاقُو رَبِّهِمْ وَلَٰكِنِّي أَرَاكُمْ قَوْمًا تَجْهَلُونَ ﴿٢٩﴾

(11:29) ***'O my people! I do not ask you any material reward for it. My reward lies only with Allah. But I will not drive away those who have faith. Indeed they will encounter their Lord. But I see that you are an ignorant lot.'***

This is intended as a response to their accusation that he was lying, with the implication that his call must be a way to seize their wealth and usurp their possessions out of greed. If he is not asking them for any of their wealth, then they have no basis to accuse him of this.

'But I will not drive away those who have faith...: This is a response to their statement, '*and we do not see anyone following you except those who are simpleminded riffraff from our midst.*' Note that it replaces the term, '*riffraff*'—which is intended to demean and belittle the believers—with '*those who have faith*', this emphasizes their connection to God and dignifies their faith and belief.

Through his response, Noah refuses to drive them away and explains his refusal by saying, '*Indeed they will encounter their Lord*.' In doing so, he calls attention to the fact that there is a day when they will return to God and be held accountable for their deeds, receiving recompense for whatever good or evil they have done while they were alive. Their judgement is

with their Lord, and no one else has any say in the matter. Thus, it is not up to Noah to hold them to account or to recompense them in any way. However, due to their ignorance, the elite of his people who disbelieve expect the poor, the needy, and the weak to be driven away from the community of goodness, and to be deprived of blessings, respect, and dignity.

Therefore, it becomes clear that what is meant by, '*Indeed they will encounter their Lord*', is that they believe they will be held to account by God on the day they return to Him and stand before Him. A similar idea is expressed in the verse, *Do not drive away those who supplicate their Lord morning and evening desiring His face. Neither are you accountable for them in any way, nor are they accountable for you in any way, so that you may drive them away and thus become one of the wrongdoers* (6:52).

Some scholars have explained Noah's statement, '*Indeed they will encounter their Lord*' as meaning that he does not drive them away because they are destined to meet their Lord, who will render justice to those who have been wronged and expelled. Others have said it means he does not drive them away because they are destined to receive rewards from their Lord, so how could he consider them 'riffraff' and how could it be permissible to expel them when they do not deserve such treatment? However, both of these readings are far from the apparent meaning of the text. Furthermore, the first one renders the following verse, *O my people! Who would come to my help against Allah were I to drive them away?* (11:30) superfluous, as should be obvious.

It also appears that when he says, '*But I see that you are an ignorant lot*', he is referring to their ignorance about the Hereafter and about the fact that judgement and recompense belong solely to God and not to anyone else. Some scholars have suggested that ignorance (*jahl*) here refers to their behavior, meaning they are lacking in good sense and behaving foolishly; others have suggested it means that they are ignorant of the fact that the only thing that sets one human being apart from another is following the truth, doing good deeds, and adopting virtuous characteristics, rather than wealth or status, as they imagine. However, neither of these meetings accord with the context of the verse.

وَيَا قَوْمِ مَنْ يَنْصُرُنِي مِنَ اللَّهِ إِنْ طَرَدْتُهُمْ ۚ أَفَلَا تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

(11:30) *'O my people! Who would come to my help* (yanṣuru-nī)

against Allah were I to drive them away? Will you not then take admonition?'

Naṣr ('help') means to protect or save someone from something. In this case, Noah asks his audience: 'Who among you could protect me or save me from God's punishment if he drove away the believers who you deride as "*riffraff*"? Do you not see that to do this to them would be a grave wrong and God Almighty comes to the aid of those who are wronged against the ones who wronged them and avenges them? Surely reason dictates that God does not treat oppressor and oppressed equally, nor does he leave the oppressor to oppress others without requiting him for his injustice in a way that hurts him and heals the heart of the oppressed, for surely God is Mighty and Vengeful.'

وَلَا أَقُولُ لَكُمْ عِنْدِى خَزَاٰئِنُ اللَّهِ وَلَا أَعْلَمُ الْغَيْبَ وَلَآ أَقُولُ إِنِّى مَلَكٌ وَلَآ أَقُولُ لِلَّذِينَ تَزْدَرِى أَعْيُنُكُمْ لَنْ يُؤْتِيَهُمُ اللَّهُ خَيْرًا ۖ اللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا فِى أَنْفُسِهِمْ ۖ إِنِّى إِذًا لَمِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٣١﴾

(11:31) ***'I do not say to you that I possess the treasuries of Allah, neither do I know the Unseen. I do not claim to be an angel, neither do I say of those who are despicable in your eyes that Allah will not grant them any good—Allah knows best what is in their hearts—for then I would indeed be a wrongdoer.'***

This is a response to their saying, '*Nor do we see that you have any merit over us*.' He refutes their argument by asserting that he does not claim to possess any merit they might expect from him by virtue of his claim of prophethood. They presume that a prophet should have access to the treasuries of divine mercy, being able to enrich the poor, heal the sick, resurrect the dead, and control the heavens and the earth and all parts of the universe as he wills and however he wills. And to have the knowledge of the Unseen, thereby acquiring all forms of concealed goodness and warding off all forms of hidden harm. In sum, they expected a prophet to increase in goodness and be safeguarded from all misfortune. They believed that a prophet should ascend from the level of humanity to the station of divinity, that is, to become a sovereign who was free from natural weaknesses and free from the needs and imperfections of humanity. He should

not eat, drink, marry, or have to earn a livelihood in order to procure the necessities and wares of life.

It is as if to say: 'These are the aspects of superiority that you claim a messenger must possess and independently control, but you are mistaken. The messenger's only claim is the message he brings. I do not claim any of these things: I do not claim to possess the treasuries of God, nor do I claim to know the Unseen, nor do I claim to be an angel. In sum, I do not claim any of the merits or advantages which you expect from me and which you deny me for lacking. I only claim that I have clear proof from my Lord that confirms my message and grants me mercy from Him.'

The treasuries of Allah refers to all the hidden treasures and resources from which creatures draw their provision, meet their needs of subsistence, and remedy their wants and deficiencies.

Ordinary folk assume that prophets and saints must be given the keys to these divine treasuries and, with them, possess the power to do as they please and rule however they wished. This is, in fact, something that people expected and demanded from the Prophet himself, as God recounts in the verse: *They say, 'We will not believe you until you make a spring gush forth for us from the ground. Or until you have a garden of date palms and vines and you make streams gush through it. Or until you cause the sky to fall in fragments upon us, just as you would aver. Or until you bring Allah and the angels in front of us. Or until you have a house of gold, or you ascend into the sky. And we will not believe your ascension until you bring down for us a book that we may read.' Say, 'Immaculate is my Lord! Am I anything but a human, a messenger?'* (17:90–93).

Note that Noah also said, '*neither do I know the Unseen*.' He did not say, 'neither do I claim to know the Unseen.' This is because this is a type of knowledge that must be kept secret and not announced to people. The statement, 'Nor do I claim to know the Unseen', does not negate the speaker's access to such knowledge, it merely denies that he has made any claims to it. Instead, the speaker must say, '*neither do I know the Unseen*' to deny that he possesses any such knowledge. This is in contrast to '*I do not say to you that I possess the treasuries of Allah*' and '*I do not claim to be an angel*.' Note also that he did not repeat '*to you*', because it was sufficient to mention this only once.

God commanded His Prophet Muhammad to address his people in

the same fashion Noah addressed his. The full significance of this further illuminated when He said, *Say, 'I do not say to you that I possess the treasuries of Allah, nor do I know the Unseen, nor do I say to you that I am an angel. I follow only what is revealed to me.' Say, 'Are the blind one and the seer equal? So do you not reflect?'* (6:50)

Consider His saying, *'I do not say to you that I possess the treasuries of Allah...'*, then consider His saying, '*I follow only what is revealed to me*', and finally consider His saying, " *Say, 'Are the blind one and the seer equal? So do you not reflect?'* The first negates the superiority that most people expect from their prophet, the second affirms for the messenger only the message itself, and the third proceeds to establish superiority from a perspective that is distinct from the one that people expect. This superiority is that the Prophet sees with the sight of God Almighty such that, in relation to him, others are like the blind compared to the one who sees. This is the rationale for why they must follow him, just as the blind follows the seeing, and this gives him the authority to call them to follow him.

On the Capabilities of the Prophets and *Awliyā'*: A Qur'anic-Philosophical Discussion

The vast majority of people are unaware of their Lord's exalted station and oblivious to the significance of His omnipresence and dominion. Even as their human nature guides them to believe in His existence and oneness, the challenges of the material and natural world that they face, their immersion in natural laws and norms, then human social orders, and their habitual familiarity with multiplicity and superficiality lead them to measure the divine world by what they are familiar with from the material world. Therefore, God Almighty, to them, in relation to His creation, is conceived of in terms befitting a mortal tyrant in relation to his subjects and slaves.

For example, consider an individual being whom we might call a king or a tyrant. Below him are ministers, commands, soldiers, and agents who carry out his commands and prohibitions. He bestows gifts and favors upon whomever he wills, possesses desires and aversions, takes and gives back, withholds and grants, displays both mercy and anger, adjudicates cases, abrogates laws, and so forth. Both the king and his servants, his agents, his subjects, and all the blessings and life's luxuries that are managed

by them, exist independently and separately from one another. They are only connected to each other through rules, laws, and customary norms that exist solely in the mind of the thinker and the belief of the believer.

Therefore, people have compared the divine realm—by which I mean what revelation has told us about God's exalted station, His attributes, actions, angels, books, and messengers —to this human system. They imagine that He, the exalted, likes and dislikes, gives and takes, and manages the system of creation just like a mortal king, who has limited existence and is separate from the rest of the universe. Each of His angels and the rest of His creation has an distinct existence and controls whatever existence and blessings they possess independent of God Almighty. God existed at the beginning of time, alone, with none of His creation with Him, then He created in the aspect of eternity, so they came to exist with Him but separate from Him.

As you see, they have affirmed a limited being, overlaid on time, even though its temporal existence is eternal. It has power over everything, knowledge of everything, an irresistible will, an irrevocable decree, and is independent in its attributes and actions, just as each of us is independent in what we possess of life, knowledge, power, and so forth. Our life is our life and not God's, our knowledge is our knowledge and not God's, our power is our power and not God's, and so on. It is only said of our existence, or life, or knowledge, or power that it belongs to God in the same sense that it is said that whatever blessings the subjects have belong to the king—meaning that it was originally with him, but he removed it from his presence and gave it to us for us to manage as we see fit. All of this, as you see, is based on an assumption of limitedness and isolation.

However, definitive rational arguments clearly demonstrate the erroneousness of all of this. They demonstrate that existential poverty is all-pervasive and that all contingent beings stand in need of God in their essences and the traits of their essences. If their need for God is at the level of their essence, then independence from Him and isolation from Him become impossible. If we were to posit that something was independent of Him, be it in its existence or in the traits of its existence—whether this was in its origination or subsistence—it would not need Him from that aspect, which would be a logical impossibility.

This is because no contingent thing is independent in any aspect of

its essence or the traits of its essence. Only God Almighty is independent in His essence, for He is utterly self-sufficient, does not lack anything, and loses nothing of existence or perfection, such as life, power, or knowledge. There is no limit to Him by which He can be defined. We have already explained this to some extent in our commentary on the verse,

Every contingent thing is not independent in anything of its essence and the effects of its essence. God Almighty is the one who is independent in His essence. He is the self-sufficient one who does not lack anything and loses nothing of existence and the perfection of existence like life, power, and knowledge. There is no limit to Him that can define Him. Some clarification for this matter was provided earlier in the explanation of His exalted saying, *They are certainly faithless who say, 'Allah is the third of a trinity'* (5:73).

Based on the above, the existence, life, power, and knowledge of any contingent being is dependent upon God's existence and is not independent from Him in any aspect. There is no distinction in this between the many and the few in this regard, as long as the characteristic of non-independence is maintained. Thus, there is no objection to presuming a contingent being to have knowledge of everything, power over everything, or eternal life, as long as its existence is not independent of God Almighty and is not separate from the universe. Similarly, there is no objection to the realization of the contingent with a temporary existence, knowledge, or power in relation to some things but not others. Indeed, the assumption of independence negates the innate need of contingency, and there is no difference in this between the many and the few, as should be clear. This is from the perspective of reason.

From the perspective of revelation, the Qur'an speaks of some attributes and actions as belonging exclusively to God, such as knowledge of the Unseen, giving life, causing death, and creation. This is something we can observe in the verses: *With Him are the treasures of the Unseen; no one knows them except Him* (6:59); *and that it is He who brings death and gives life* (53:44); *Allah takes the souls at the time of their death* (39:42); *Allah is creator of all things* (39:62); and there are many others like this. However, the meanings of these verses are explained by other verses, such as: *Knower of the Unseen, He does not disclose His Unseen to anyone, except to an messenger He approves of* (72:26–27); *Say, 'You will be taken away by the angel of*

death...' (32:11); and the statement of Jesus, *and I revive the dead by Allah's leave* (3:49); and the verse, *and when you would create from clay the form of a bird, with My leave, and you would breathe into it and it would become a bird, with My leave* (5:110).

Putting these verses together leaves no doubt that what is intended by the first set of verses, which point to these being the exclusive domain of God, is to negate anyone having access to such attributes independent of God, and what is intended by the affirming verses is the possibility of the realization of these attributes in others than Him in the sense of their being dependent upon Him.

So, a person might affirm some knowledge of the Unseen or supernatural power—by which I mean knowledge without the means of thinking and power without its normal natural course—for beings others than God from among His prophets and *awliyā'*. Such attributions are often found in reports and traditions. However, this person could also simultaneously deny that such knowledge or power exists independently of God or originate from anyone other than him. Therefore, this knowledge and power belong to God, and whatever appeared from it only appeared by His making the prophets and *awliyā'* intermediaries and whatever occurred from it did so only by virtue of His granting it existence. As you can see, there is no problem this belief.

On the other hand, those who affirm anything like this while maintaining that such knowledge or power exists independently of God—as understood in the conventional sense—even if they attribute it to God and the outpouring of His mercy, are not free from extremist beliefs (*ghuluww*). Therefore, they fall within the scope of the verse, *O People of the Book! Do not exceed the bounds in your religion, and do not attribute anything to Allah except the truth* (4:171).

Commentary continues:

'...neither do I say of those who are despicable in your eyes **(tazdarī aʿyunu-kum)** ***that Allah will not grant them any good—Allah knows best what is in their hearts—for then I would indeed be a wrongdoer':***
According to al-Rāghib:

> 'The verb *zirāya* (from which *tazdarī* is derived) means to criticize someone, while *azraya* means to belittle or ridicule them, as does

izdirā. *Tazdarī aʿyunu-kum* means to treat them with disdain and contempt.'

This section of Noah's discourse is a reference to the beliefs held by the elite disbelievers among his people, who established a tradition of aristocracy and sovereignty. They believed that human individuals are divided into two categories: the powerful and the weak. The powerful are those who have wealth and resources, while the weak are everyone else. The powerful are the leaders in the human community, enjoying blessings and honor. They are the reason for the formation of the community, and those who are weak exist only to serve them. They are meant to be subject of their benefits, like the subjects of an absolute government, like slaves to masters, like servants and workers to their employers, and women to men. In the end, every weak person is weak relative to the strong, who rule over them.

In summary, their belief was that the weak in society are degraded humans or animals in human form. They are included in society and share in life so that the aristocrats can benefit from their labour. They are deprived of dignity, excluded from the realm of nobility, and hopeless of mercy and care.

This was their perception and what their society was based on. Noah refuted this belief by saying, " *neither do I say of those who are despicable in your eyes that Allah will not grant them any good*

He highlighted the error in their belief by saying, '*Allah knows best what is in their hearts.*' This means that your eyes scorn them and belittle them due to the apparent weakness they exhibit. However, this is not the decisive factor for acquiring goodness or attaining honor. The essential factor, especially regarding divine honors and rewards, is the state of the soul and its adornment with virtues and moral values. Neither you nor I have access to the inner realities of souls and the secrets of hearts except God. Therefore, it is not for you or me to decide that they are deprived of goodness and happiness.

He further clarified this by saying, *for then I would indeed be a wrongdoer*, which provides the reason why he avoids making such pronouncements. The implication is that such a pronouncement would be one made out of ignorance. Furthermore, to deny the possibility of good coming to someone who might deserve it, without any proof for this, is an injustice which no human should dare to commit, as this alone would be sufficient

to classify them as a wrongdoer.

This is what God alludes to when recounting the words of the People of the Elevations on the Day of Judgement, addressing these transgressors, saying, " *And the occupants of the Elevations will call out to certain men whom they recognise by their marks, 'Your rallying did not avail you, nor what you used to disdain. Are these the ones concerning whom you swore that Allah will not extend them any mercy?'* (7:48–49)

When Noah says in his speech, *neither do I say of those who are despicable in your eyes ...* he indirectly implies that, as they deny the weaker members of the community certain key societal benefits, they similarly deny them spiritual dignity, claiming that these weaker members cannot achieve happiness through religion. According to them, only the elite and powerful members of society can attain happiness. Through, through this statement, Noah also implies that they are, in fact, the wrongdoers.

Noah responds to his people's declaration with the words, *I do not say to you that I possess the treasuries of Allah, neither do I know the Unseen. I do not claim to be an angel*... In doing so, he denies all claims of superiority they expect from a messenger on his own behalf. He does the same by saying, *neither do I say of those who are despicable in your eyes that Allah will not grant them any good*, even though this refers to the weaker believers among his people, because the elite counted him amongst them when they said, *Nor do we see that you have any merit over us* (11:27).

Thereby, he clarified that the meaning of their words was, 'Following you and those who believe in you, these outcasts, only makes sense if there is some benefit for us in this. We see no such benefit from you. As for you, you do not possess the angelic power or knowledge of the unseen, or the purity from worldly and natural tribulations that are characteristic of a messenger. As for those who believe in you, they are the outcasts amongst us, devoid of human dignity, deprived of mercy and care.'

Noah responded to them by saying words to the effect of: 'As for me, I do not claim any of the things you expect me to claim as a messenger of God, for the only function of the messenger is to deliver his message. As for the dispossessed whom you despise and scorn, God might see some good in their hearts and grant them goodness and grace for that reason, for He knows their hearts better than anyone. The true measure of religious dignity and divine mercy lies in the purity of the soul and the integrity of

the heart, rather than in the outward appearance that your eyes disparage. Therefore, I will not say, "*Allah will not grant them any good*," for that would be an injustice that would place me among the wrongdoers.'

قَالُوا يَا نُوحُ قَدْ جَادَلْتَنَا فَأَكْثَرْتَ جِدَالَنَا فَأْتِنَا بِمَا تَعِدُنَا إِنْ كُنْتَ مِنَ الصَّادِقِينَ ﴿٣٢﴾

(11:32) *They said, 'O Noah, you have disputed with us already, and you have disputed with us exceedingly. Now bring us what you threaten us with should you be truthful.'*

This is something they told Noah after they were unable to refute his argument or invalidate the truth to which he called them. It is a statement laden with challenge and provocation. When they say, '*Now bring us what you threaten us with*', they are referring to *the punishment of a painful day* (11:26), of which he had warned them at the beginning of his mission.

Note that God reports their statement independently, without introducing it with a preposition such as *fa* ('so'), which would indicate that it followed on from what Noah had told them. This is because they only said it after Noah had spent a long period amongst them calling them to monotheism, arguing, and engaging them in theological disputes until he had eliminated all their excuses and had made the truth clear to them, as indicated by God's words recounting Noah's prayers: *He said, 'My Lord! Indeed I have summoned my people night and day... Again I summoned them aloud, and again appealed to them publicly and confided with them privately* (71:5–9). And as God recounts in Sūrah al-'Ankabūt, *Certainly We sent Noah to his people, and he remained with them for a thousand-less-fifty years* (29:14). Thus, what God has reported about Noah's arguments with his people and their responses all transpired over a span of centuries. This is a common feature of the Qur'anic discourse and not an anomaly. The one who narrates this is God, who encompasses all of time and everything within it, and the one who receives this narration through revelation is the Prophet who has been granted such a breadth of vision that he can see the variances of nations and the ends of time.

Therefore, the meaning of their statement is, 'O Noah, you have debated with us and prolonged the argument until we have grown weary and bored, and we are not going to believe in you. So, bring us the

punishment with which you have threatened us!' They do not admit their inability to counter his arguments or engage in a debate with him. Instead, they give up all hope of arguing against him and demand instead that he occupy himself with what occupies a preacher who has lost hope of being heard and obeyed by his audience. This matter is the harm with which he threatens them and mentions beyond his moral exhortations.

قَالَ إِنَّمَا يَأْتِيكُمْ بِهِ اللَّهُ إِنْ شَاءَ وَمَا أَنْتُمْ بِمُعْجِزِينَ ﴿٣٣﴾

(11:33) *He said, 'Allah will indeed bring it on you if He wishes, and you cannot thwart'*

When Noah's people told him, '*Now bring us what you threaten us with should you be truthful*', they were demanding that he bring down God's punishment upon them. However, as he was only a messenger, his response to this demand was, in all humility, that he did not have the power to bring down this punishment upon them, rather this was something only God could do. It is God who is sovereign over their affairs, and only He can bring down the punishment that Noah had warned them of by God's command. After all, God is their lord and their affair devolves to Him; Noah has no power over the direction of any aspect of their existence. In fact, even Noah's warnings of divine punishment and their impertinent demand that he bring them this punishment have no effect on God's power and authority. If God wills it, He will bring the punishment, and if He does not, it will not happen.

From here, it becomes evident that his saying '*if He wishes*' is among the most subtle qualifications in this context. This is insofar as it establishes the perfection and transcendence of God, indicating that nothing governs Him and no one has any power or influence over Him whatsoever. He does as He wills, and no one else except Him has such power. This is analogous to what comes later in the chapter, in the exception found in His saying, *As for the felicitous, they will be in paradise. They will remain in it for as long as the heavens and the earth endure—except what your Lord may wish—an endless bounty* (11:108).

As for when Noah says, '*...and you cannot thwart*', this is another declaration of God's perfection and transcendence. At the same time, it is a response to the challenge they directed to Noah. On the surface, it seems

they were not concerned with the punishment he threatened them with, as if they were invincible and beyond his reach.

وَلَا يَنْفَعُكُمْ نُصْحِي إِنْ أَرَدْتُ أَنْ أَنْصَحَ لَكُمْ إِنْ كَانَ اللَّهُ يُرِيدُ أَنْ يُغْوِيَكُمْ ۚ هُوَ رَبُّكُمْ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٣٤﴾

(11:34) *My exhorting* (nuṣḥī) *will not benefit you, much as I may seek to exhort you, if Allah desires to consign you to perversity* (ghayy). *He is your Lord, and to Him you shall be brought back.'*

In his *Mufradāt*, al-Rāghib writes:

> '*Nuṣḥ* ('exhortation') refers to actions or words that are conducive to the wellbeing of one's companion. One can also say *naṣaḥtū la-hu al-wadd* ('I acted in good faith towards him') when one has been pure in one's friendship to another. By the same token, pure honey can be described with the adjective *nāṣiḥ*, derived from the same root. Equally, one can use the verb *naṣaḥa* for stitching leather together, and the noun *nāṣiḥ* denotes a tailor (*khayyāṭ*) and *nuṣāḥ* the act of stitching (*khayṭ*).'

He also says:

> '*Ghayy* ('peversity') means to act foolishly on the basis of erroneous beliefs. This is because foolishness (*jahl*) may arise from a person without any specific belief, neither correct or incorrect. It may also arise from holding onto a corrupt belief, and in this second context, it is referred to as *ghayy*. As God Almighty says, *your companion has neither gone astray, nor gone amiss* (ghawā) (53:2), and *But their brethren, they draw them into error* (ghayy) (7:202).'

Based on this, the distinction between *ighwā'* and *iḍlāl* (both of which can be understood in the sense of 'to lead astray') is that the latter means to divert someone from the right path while the correct objective remains in the person's mind, whereas *ighwā'* is to divert them from it while also causing the correct objective to be forgotten due to the person becoming preoccupied with something else out of ignorance.

The terms 'will' (*irāda*) and 'wish' (*mashiyya*) are often used synonymously with regard to the Divine Will, which is what emanates from God in the form of empowering causes to inevitably give rise to the existence of something. Thus, when something is willed by God, He completes all

the prerequisites for its existence, making its existence an inevitability. The principle of causality is an act of the Divine Will in itself. Therefore, it is said that God created things through His will and His will through Himself.

On the whole, when Noah says, '*My exhorting will not benefit you*', this represents one side of an equivocation, while the other half is '*you cannot thwart*.' It is as though he is saying, 'Your affair is up to God. If He wills to punish you, He will inflict the punishment upon you, and nothing can repel His punishment or override His will. Therefore, you cannot thwart Him, nor will my exhortations avail you—if I wish to advise you—once God intends to lead you astray to disbelieve in Him, thus fulfilling upon you the decree of punishment. Noah's advice is contingent because they did not concede that he was advising them.

The term *ighwā'* is used in a similar fashion to *iḍlāl*, save for the fact that it cannot be attributed to God from the outset, although it is possible to attribute it to Him as a form of recompense, such as when a person disobeys Him and therefore becomes deserving of misguidance. In this situation, God deprives them of access to the means of guidance, leaving them to devices, and thereby leading them astray from the path of truth. As God says, *Thereby He leads many astray, and thereby He guides many; and He leads no one astray thereby except the transgressors* (2:26).

This passage suggests that before God sent down His punishment of annihilation upon them, He first led them astray. This is also what is suggested by the verse, *And when We desire to destroy a town We command its affluent ones* (to *obey Allah). But they commit transgression in it, and so the word becomes due against it, and We destroy it utterly* (17:16); and also the verse, *We have assigned them companions who make to seem decorous to them whatever is before them and whatever is behind them, and the word became due against them* (41:25).

When Noah says, '*He is your Lord, and to Him you shall be brought back*', this provides the rationale behind his previous statement, *My exhorting will not benefit you ...* or to the passage *Allah will indeed bring it on you if He wishes ... if Allah desires to consign you to perversity* (11:34). The meaning is that the management of the servants' affairs belongs to the Lord, to whom all matters will return. God, glory be to Him, is your Lord, and to Him, you will return. Therefore, it is not up to me to bring you the

promised punishment, and it is not up to you to thwart Him if He wills to bring you the punishment and decides to annihilate you completely, and it is not up to my advice to benefit you if He wants to lead you astray to punish you.

A number of different explanations have been offered for the statement, *if Allah desires to consign you to perversity*:

1) Some say that it means: 'If God desires to punish you for your disbelief.' The Qur'an occasionally uses the term *ghayy* to denote punishment, as in the verse, *So they will soon encounter perversity* (ghayy) (19:59).

2) Others have said it means: 'If God desires to punish you for leading others astray and misguiding them.' This is because it was the habit of the Arabs to name a punishment after the thing it was supposed to punishment. We can observe this device in the verse, *It is Allah who derides them* (2:15)—meaning He punishes them for their derision; and in the verse, *Then they plotted, and Allah also plotted* (3:54)—in other words, He punished them for their plotting. And there are many other examples of this.

3) Still others have said that, *consign you to perversity*, means: 'If God intends to destroy you.' This reading of *ghayy* relies on an alternate meaning of the word, which denotes when a calf becomes ill from the overconsumption of milk.

4) Another explanation of the phrase is that the people of Noah believed that God intentionally led His servants astray from the right religion, and that their existing state was the result of God's will. They thought that if God had willed otherwise, He would change their condition and compel them to the contrary. In response to this belief, Noah states, as if in astonishment and denial of their claim, '*My exhorting will not benefit you* if it is indeed as you say.'

However, the reader who ponders on what we have presented above will note that the verse does not require such explanations.

أَمْ يَقُولُونَ افْتَرَاهُ ۖ قُلْ إِنِ افْتَرَيْتُهُ فَعَلَيَّ إِجْرَامِي وَأَنَا بَرِيءٌ مِمَّا تُجْرِمُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾

(11:35) *Do they say, 'He has fabricated it?' Say, 'Should I have fabricated it, then my guilt* (ijrām) *will be upon me, and I am absolved of your guilty conduct* (mā tujrimūn)*.'*

According to al-Rāghib: '*Jurm* originally meant to cut the fruit from trees. *Ijrām* means to acquire an offence, and the terms came to denote every form of ill-gotten gain. Therefore, *jurm* and *jarm* both mean an ill-gotten gain or a sin.'

This verse is intended to serve as a counter-argument. It is very interesting to note that Noah's calling to his people and his arguments against their idol-worshipping, especially as presented by God in this particular chapter, greatly resemble the Prophet's own call and arguments against the idolatry of his own people.

If you desire further confirmation of this, consider Sūrah al-Anʿām, which is in reality a chapter of argumentation, and compare what God has related about Noah in this chapter and what God bids the Prophet to do in that chapter, especially the verses: *Say, 'I do not say to you that I possess the treasuries of Allah, nor do I know the Unseen, nor do I say to you that I am an angel ... Do not drive away those who supplicate their Lord morning and evening ... Say, 'I do not follow your desires, for then I will have gone astray, and I will not be among the guided.' Say, 'Indeed I stand on a manifest proof from my Lord and you have denied it ...'* (6:50–57).

In fact, you can apply all of Noah's arguments mentioned in Sūrah Nūḥ and Sūrah al-Aʿrāf to those that have been mentioned in Sūrah al-Anʿām and the present chapter of the Qurʾan to confirm this thesis.

Given this similarity and relevance, it makes sense that, after recounting the arguments used by Noah when warning his people by God's command, the focus shifts to the accusations they levelled against the Prophet of fabricating lies about God. The Prophet's warnings and arguments were no different to those that Noah conveyed to his own people. Just as a king's messenger warns his own people and the rebels amongst them who refuse to obey the sovereign by offering them advice and clear evidence. When they accuse him of fabricating lies about the king, and that they owe him no obedience or loyalty, he responds by advising them again, reminding them of the story of another genuine messenger sent by the king to a different group. This messenger gave the same advice he had, but his people did not heed it and were destroyed as a result. Every time he presents his arguments and warnings to them, he is moved to remember their accusation that he is fabricating lies, expressing his regret, saying, 'You accuse me of falsehood, yet I have only conveyed to you the wisdom and advice that

this other messenger imparted to his people. If I have fabricated it, my sin is on me and you can refuse to accept my word, but I am not responsible for your actions.'

God returns to this method of disputation later in the same chapter, after narrating stories of several messengers, where He says: *Whatever We relate to you of the accounts of the messengers are those by which We strengthen your heart, and there has come to you in this the truth and an advice and admonition for the faithful. And say to those who do not have faith, 'Act according to your ability; we too are acting. And wait! We too are waiting'* (11:120–122).

Some exegetes suggest that the verse is actually part of Noah's story and his dialogue with his people. In other words: 'Do Noah's people claim he fabricated it? Say, O Noah, "Should I have fabricated it, then my guilt will be upon me, and I am absolved of your guilty conduct."' According to this reading, the speech contains a transition from the third person to the direct address, but this does not accord with the context of the verses.

When he says, '*I am absolved of your guilty conduct*', this is an affirmation of their ongoing guilt having been confronted by irrefutable evidence that he is indeed a messenger of God. There is also an affirmation of their guilt in the previous statement, *then my guilt will be upon me*. After all, if what Noah has mentioned as arguments were indeed fabricated, it would have been a lie from the perspective that Noah did not actually make these arguments to his people, even if they are true. However, from the perspective that these are rational arguments that are definitive and irrefutable, they affirm for these disbelievers a constant guilt in their rejection of what would lead them to faith and good deeds. They are definitively guilty in their deviation from these arguments, and the Prophet is not definitively guilty, but only under the assumption that he could be fabricating, and he is not a fabricator.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, it is narrated by Ibn Abī Naṣr al-Bazanṭī from Imām al-Riḍā: 'God said of Noah, *My exhorting will not benefit you, much as I may seek to exhort you, if Allah desires to consign you to perversity*. Therefore, the matter is up to God. He guides and misleads.'

Author's comment: We have already explained this previously.

(2) In *Tafsīr al-Burhān*, regarding the verse, *Do they say, 'He has fabricated it?'* (11:35), it is narrated from al-Shaybānī's *Nahj al-bayān*, from Muqātil: 'The disbelievers of Mecca said, "Muḥammad has invented the Qur'an!"' And similar reports have been narrated from Imām al-Bāqir and Imām al-Ṣādiq.

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Verses 36–49

This section presents conclusion of Noah's story and encompasses several sub-sections, such as his revelation about the punishment descending upon his people, the command to build the Ark, the manner of the divine punishment's descent in the form of a flood, the tale of his drowned son, and the story of his survival along with those who were with him aboard the Ark. Nevertheless, all these can be read as single section about God's adjudication between this prophet and his people.

وَأُوحِيَ إِلَىٰ نُوحٍ أَنَّهُ لَنْ يُؤْمِنَ مِنْ قَوْمِكَ إِلَّا مَنْ قَدْ آمَنَ فَلَا تَبْتَئِسْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَفْعَلُونَ ﴿٣٦﴾

(11:36) *It was revealed to Noah: 'None of your people will believe except those who already have faith; so do not lament* (lā tabta'is) *for what they used to do.'*

Ibti'ās ('to lament') is derived from *bu's*, which signifies sadness combined with resignation.

When God tells Noah, *None of your people will believe except those who already have faith*, this is telling him to resign himself to the fact that no more of the disbelievers from among his people will accept his message after this. That is why God follows on from this by saying '*so do not lament for what they used to do*.' This is because someone who calls others to embrace a particular cause only feels distressed and grieved when those he invites reject his message so long as he has hope for their belief and response to his call. However, when he loses all hope of a positive response from them, he no longer concerns himself with them and does not exhaust himself in calling them to hear and obey, persistently urging them to turn to him. If he calls them henceforth, it would only be for another purpose such as completing the argument and removing all excuses from them.

Therefore, the phrase, '*so do not lament for what they used to do*', is also intended to console Noah and reassure him that he had done everything within his power. It also indicates the imminent arrival of the time for

God to judge between him and his people. This is also intended to protect him from feeling distress and grief for what he had witnessed in terms of his people's persecution of him and the believers among his people over a long period (which was nearly a thousand years) of his stay amongst them.

It is apparent from the explanations of some scholars that they inferred from the phrase, *None of your people will believe except those who already have faith*, that those who disbelieved among them would never believe henceforth, just as those who believed in him remained steadfast in their faith. However, the text itself is entirely focused on the lack of belief among the disbelievers from that point onward—the faith of the believers was not the primary concern except as it was established previously—and the exception does not indicate anything beyond that. As for taking this as evidence of their steadfastness and continuity in faith, there is no evidence to support it.

From this verse, we can deduce, first, that divine punishment will not befall the disbelievers in this world so long as there is still hope of them believing. However, once disbelief has taken root in their hearts and they are consumed by the contamination of idolatry, that is when the sentence of punishment becomes due against them.

Second, consider God's account of Noah's supplication: *And Noah said, 'My Lord! 'Do not leave on the earth any inhabitant from among the faithless. If You leave them, they will lead astray Your servants and will not beget except vicious ingrates'* (71:26–27). Noah appears to have uttered this between God's revealing to him that, '*None of your people will believe except those who already have faith …*' and, '*Build the Ark before Our eyes and by Our revelation, and do not plead with Me for those who are wrongdoers: they shall indeed be drowned*' (11:37).

This is because, as some scholars have noted, the future faith (or lack thereof) of the disbelievers cannot be known through reason alone, but only through divine revelation. Noah first learned from God's revelation that none of his people, or even their progeny, would believe in God after this point. Only then did he pray for their punishment, incorporating into his supplication what God had just revealed to him. When God answered his prayer and decided to destroy them, He commanded Noah to build the Ark and informed him that they would be drowned.

وَاصْنَعِ الْفُلْكَ بِأَعْيُنِنَا وَوَحْيِنَا وَلَا تُخَاطِبْنِي فِي الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا ۚ إِنَّهُمْ

مُغْرَقُونَ ﴿٣٧﴾

(11:37) *'Build the Ark* (fulk) *before Our eyes* (bi-aʿyuni-nā) *and by Our revelation, and do not plead with Me for those who are wrongdoers: they shall indeed be drowned.'*

Fulk ('ark') means 'ship' (*safīna*) and is the same in both singular and plural forms. *Aʿyun* ('eyes') is a plural of scarcity (*jamʿ qilla*), meaning it signifies a small number of something. God uses the plural form here to emphasise His abundant and intense observation of Noah, as this sentence as a whole symbolizes God's oversight of Noah's construction of the Ark.

The mention of 'eyes' in this verse indicates that the meaning of revelation (*waḥī*) in the phrase *it was revealed to Noah* is not this—namely, *'Build the Ark before Our eyes'*—in the sense of the revelation of a divine ordinance. Rather it was a revelation in the sense of sending practical guidance to accomplish the action, an enabling and directing of the act supported by the Holy Spirit, as in 'do this' and 'do that'" as God mentioned for the Imams of Abraham's progeny, saying: *We made them imams, guiding by Our command, and We revealed to them the performance of good deeds, the maintenance of prayers, and the giving of zakat, and they used to worship Us* (21:73). This has been referred to in previous discussions and will be further explored in our commentary on the verse just cited.

When God says, *'and do not plead with Me for those who are wrongdoers'*, He means: 'Do not ask me anything in order to repel harm or punishment from them, or to intercede on their behalf and protect them from evil, because the judgement has been issued and the sentence is irrevocable.' From this, it is evident that the statement, '*they shall indeed be drowned*' provides the rationale for either God saying, '*and do not plead with Me ...*' or for the entirety of the statement, '*Build the Ark before Our eyes and by Our revelation, and do not plead with Me for those who are wrongdoers: they shall indeed be drowned.*' It is also evident that when God says, '*do not plead with Me ...*', this is a reference to intercession (*shafāʿa*).

In summary, the meaning of the verse is as follows: 'Construct the ship under our complete supervision and according to our instruction. Do not ask me to divert the punishment from those who have wronged; their fate is inevitably to drown—it is a decree from which there is no escape.'

وَيَصْنَعُ الْفُلْكَ وَكُلَّمَا مَرَّ عَلَيْهِ مَلَأٌ مِنْ قَوْمِهِ سَخِرُوا مِنْهُ ۚ قَالَ إِنْ تَسْخَرُوا مِنَّا فَإِنَّا نَسْخَرُ مِنْكُمْ كَمَا تَسْخَرُونَ ﴿٣٨﴾

(11:38) *As he was building the Ark, whenever the elders of his people passed by him, they would ridicule him. He said, 'If you ridicule us* (taskharū min-nā)*, we shall ridicule you just as you ridicule us.*

In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, al-Ṭabrisī says: '*Sukhriyya* ('to ridicule') means to display contempt in a matter that implies the intellectual inferiority of its object. It is from this that the verb *taskhīr* ('to subject') is derived, which means to abase someone by force. The difference between ridicule (*sukhriyya*) and play (*laʿb*) is that ridicule involves deceit and belittling, and it only occurs among sentient beings, while play could involve inanimate things as well.'

In his *Mufradāt*, al-Rāghib states: 'To ridicule (*sukhriyya*) or mock (*istaskhara)* means to deride them. God says, *If you ridicule us, we shall ridicule you just as you ridicule us. Soon you will know* ... (11:38–39); and *Indeed you wonder, while they engage in ridicule* (*yaskhurūn*, 37:12). It is said that *sukhar* refers to the person who ridicules, while *sukhra* is the one who is ridiculed in this fashion, while *sukhriyya* and *sikhriyya* denote the act of ridiculing.'

The phrase, *As he was building the Ark* ..., describes the past circumstances and recounts the persecution Noah suffered at the hands of his people, and how some of them continually sought to disgrace and mock him while he was building the ship. Despite this, he remained patient and continued to call to God's divine message and establish the evidence against them without failing or wavering.

The phrase, ... *whenever the elders* (mala') *of his people passed by him, they would ridicule him*, is adverbial and qualifies the subject of *As he was building the Ark*. Here, *mala'* denotes a group of people that hold weight or significance. This suggests that they would come to Noah in groups to mock him as he was constructing the ship, one group after another. This shows that Noah was constructing the ship in full view of them and in a public place.

He said, 'If you ridicule us, we shall ridicule you just as you ridicule

us': This is the answer to an implicit question, as if someone asked: 'What did Noah say in response to their ridicule?' And God answered: *He said, 'If you ridicule us, we shall ridicule you just as you ridicule us'* That is why this is presented as a separate statement and is not connected to the previous one (... *whenever the elders of his people* ...).

Note that Noah did not say, 'If you ridicule me, I will ridicule you ...', as he was deflecting the ridicule not only from himself but also from the group of believers who were with him. This suggests that he received support from his family and followers, and they participated with him in the construction of the ship. The ridicule was aimed at all of them. From the text, it appears that the elders confronted Noah and those with him working on the ship with ridicule. They accused Noah of being feebleminded and mad, including all those with him in their mockery, even if they only mentioned Noah specifically in their derision.

The meaning here is that custom and convention would dictate that Noah's people would mock his followers in the same manner as they mocked him. The faithful were a single community, living closely together. Their mockery of his followers was in essence mockery of Noah himself, because he was the cornerstone upon which the call to faith was built. This is why the verse says, *they would ridicule him* and does not say, 'they would ridicule him and the believers who were with him.'

While it is foolish and deplorable to ridicule others when you are the initiator, it is permissible to respond in kind to the mockery of others, especially if there is a rational benefit attached to this, such as demonstrating one's own resolve or completing the argument against one's opponents. God has said: *Allah shall put them to ridicule, and there is a painful punishment for them* (9:79). This reflects the principle of reciprocal response, as emphasized by the phrase '*as you ridicule us*.'

فَسَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ مَنْ يَأْتِيهِ عَذَابٌ يُخْزِيهِ وَيَحِلُّ عَلَيْهِ عَذَابٌ مُقِيمٌ ﴿٣٩﴾

(11:39) *'Soon you will know whom a disgraceful punishment will overtake and on whom a lasting punishment will descend.'*

The context dictates that, '*Soon you will know*' follows on from the conditional sentence in the previous verse, '*If you ridicule us, we shall ridicule you just as you ridicule us*' (11:38). This provides the content of the

mockery that Noah directed towards his own people in response to their derision of him and his followers. Therefore, '*whom a disgraceful punishment will overtake*' is the object of the verb 'know' in '*soon you will know*,' signifying the certainty of this knowledge. Therefore, the meaning of this verse is that Noah said to them: 'If you mock us, then we will mock you, and we will say to you: "You will come to know who will receive the punishment—us or you?"' This is a form of mockery that relies on the truth.

The phrase, '*whom a disgraceful punishment will overtake*', refers to the divine punishment of extermination in this world, which in this case is the Flood that shamed and humiliated them. Conversely, the phrase, '*and on whom a lasting punishment will descend*', refers to the enduring, inescapable punishment that will be inflicted upon them in the Hereafter, which is the torment of Hellfire. The proof for the first punishment being in this world and the second being in the Hereafter is the repetition of the word 'punishment' in the verse, which is first described as humiliating and second as enduring.

Some scholars have understood the phrase, *Soon you will know*, as a complete sentence, without mentioning the object of knowledge. This would make the phrase, *whom a disgraceful punishment will overtake and on whom a lasting punishment will descend*, the start of a new statement from Noah, but this reading seems unlikely within the context.

حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا جَآءَ أَمْرُنَا وَفَارَ التَّنُّورُ قُلْنَا احْمِلْ فِيهَا مِنْ كُلٍّ زَوْجَيْنِ اثْنَيْنِ
وَأَهْلَكَ إِلَّا مَنْ سَبَقَ عَلَيْهِ الْقَوْلُ وَمَنْ آمَنَ ۚ وَمَا آمَنَ مَعَهُۥٓ إِلَّا قَلِيلٌ ﴿٤٠﴾

(11:40) *When Our edict came and the oven gushed* (fār al-tannūr), *We said, 'Carry in it a pair of every kind, along with your family—except those against whom the edict has already been given—and those who have faith.' And none believed with him except a few.*

One uses the verb *fār* ('overflow') for a pot or kettle that boils over or for a fire when it blazes intensely and its flames rise up. *Tannūr* ('oven') denotes the kind of oven that is used for baking bread. This is the same in both Arabic and Persian, and it is possible that *tannūr* was originally a Persian word that was Arabicized.

The gushing of the oven refers to the rising out of it and spurting forth.

In narrations, it has been mentioned that the onset of the Flood on that day began with water erupting from the oven. The definite article (*al-*) is used with *tannūr* to convey familiarity. It is possible that the expression *fār al-tannūr* is a metaphor for God's wrath becoming intense, akin to when someone says 'in the heat of battle' in reference to a war.

Therefore, when God says, *When Our edict came and the oven gushed*, this means that Noah's situation—as described in the previous verses—continued until the divine decree became certain and was irrevocably imposed upon them, and water literally gushed from the oven or, metaphorically, God's wrath became intense. Then, God issued His commands to Noah accordingly.

There are other explanations of '*the oven*' which are far-fetched, such as the suggestion that it signifies the break of dawn, which was when the Flood first appeared. Some have suggested that it refers to the highest and most prominent places on earth, meaning that water erupted from the high and elevated lands. Others have suggested that '*the oven*' symbolizes the face of the earth.

When God says, *We said, 'Carry in it a pair of every kind …'*, it means He commanded Noah to load two of every species of animal, male and female, into the Ark.

'… along with your family—except those against whom the edict has already been given …'—means: 'And carry in it your household', which typically refers to a person's nearest and dearest, such as his spouse, his children, his children's spouses, and their children. Excepted from this are those against whom God has already issued a sentence of divine punishment, for God has already decreed that they would be destroyed. This exception includes his disloyal wife, as per the verse, *Allah draws an example for the faithless: the wife of Noah and the wife of Lot. They were under two of our righteous servants, yet they betrayed them …* (66:10), and Noah's son, who is mentioned in the following verse. It appears that Noah believed that only his treacherous spouse was excluded from this punishment, until God made clear to him that his son was not part of his household and that he was engaged in unrighteous conduct. At that point, Noah realized that his own son was among the wrongdoers.

'… and those who have faith.' And none believed with him except a few: Meaning: 'And carry in it those of your people who believed in you

besides your family', because those of his family who believed in him had already been commanded to board the Ark in the same verse, when God said: *along with your family*. And only a few of his people believed in him.

Note that the verse says, *And none believed with him*, rather than 'believed in him.' This is to hint at the meaning: 'And none believed in God with Noah except a few.' This is more apt given the context, which is about those whom God saved from the flood. The crux here is belief in God and submission to His lordship. Also, the fact that the verse says, *except a few*, without explicitly stating 'of them', emphasizes their paucity, suggesting that those who believed were few in of themselves, not just in comparison to the community as a whole; they were indeed extremely few.

وَقَالَ ارْكَبُوا فِيهَا بِسْمِ اللَّهِ مَجْرَاهَا وَمُرْسَاهَا ۚ إِنَّ رَبِّي لَغَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿٤١﴾

(11:41) *He said, 'Board it: In the Name of Allah it shall set sail* (majrā-hā) *and cast anchor* (mursā-hā). *Indeed my Lord is all-forgiving, all-merciful.'*

Majrā-hā can also be recited as *mujrā-hā*. In the first instance, this refers to the Ark's sailing and its course; in the latter instance, this refers to setting the ship in motion and steering it. By contrast, *mursā-hā*—derived from the verb *arsā*—is always recited with an *u* on the initial *mīm*, and it means to stop or fix something in place, as God says elsewhere, *and set firm the mountains* (wa al-jibāl arsā-hā).

He said, 'Board it...'—This follows on from the statement in the previous verse, *When Our edict came ...*, in other words: 'Then when Noah said ...' and this statement is addressed either to his own family and the believers or to everyone aboard the Ark.

Noah invokes God by saying, *'In the Name of Allah it shall set sail and cast anchor.'* This is in order to obtain His blessings and grace for the sailing of the Ark and its anchorage. This is because associating an action or matter with the name of God brings it protection from destruction and corruption, safeguards against misguidance and loss, as God Almighty is the Elevator of Ranks and the All-Protector, beyond reach of decay, demise, weariness, or hardship. Therefore, anything associated with Him is surely safeguarded from adverse effects as well.

Therefore, Noah connects the sailing and anchoring of the Ark to

the name of God, as sailing and anchoring are the apparent causes of the Ark and its occupants' salvation from the flood. But these causes can only succeed if they are enveloped by divine care for the Ark's passengers, which encompasses forgiveness for their sins and divine mercy for them to be saved from the flood and to live on earth thereafter. Therefore, Noah explained the rationale for his invocation by saying: *Indeed my Lord is all-forgiving, all-merciful.* This means that he mentions the name of God upon the sailing and the anchoring of his Ark because God is his Lord, the All-Forgiving, the All-Merciful. He can keep the Ark's course and anchorage safe from going astray or suffering disruption, thereby saving its occupants from the flood through His forgiveness and mercy.

Note that, according to God in the Qur'an, Noah was the first human being to invoke His sacred name. Hence, Noah, was the pioneer in opening this practice, as well as being the first to establish the argument for monotheism, the first to bring forth a scripture and a legal code, and the first to strive for the reformation of social classes and the removal of contradictions from human society.

What we have said so far about the phrase, *In the Name of Allah it shall set sail and cast anchor*, is based on the apparent meaning of the verse, namely that this statement is an invocation by Noah and that *set sail* (*majrā-hā*) and *cast anchor* (*mursā-hā*) are M-infinitives (*maṣdar mīmī*). However, it is also possible that this invocation was recited by those who were with Noah in accordance with his commands, or that *majrā* and *mursā* are, in fact, two nouns of time or place. In any case, this would alter the meaning of the verse.

In *al-Kashshāf*, al-Zamakhsharī has said with regards to the present verse that it could be construed as a single statement or as two statements: 'The single statement interpretation connects '*In the Name of Allah*' to the previous statement, '*Board it*', as a circumstantial qualifier, meaning: 'Board it while invoking God's name', or: 'Say, *In the Name of Allah* at the time of its sailing and anchoring. This could be either because *majrā-hā* and *marsā-hā* refer to time, or because they are verbal nouns like 'sailing' and 'anchoring,' and the time is omitted, similar to expressions like 'the twinkling of a star' or 'the arrival of a pilgrim.' It is also possible that the place of sailing and anchoring is meant, and these nouns stand grammatically in relation to the verbal meaning in *In the Name of Allah*,' or to the

intent of the statement.

As for the interpretation that reads this as two statements, '*In the Name of Allah it shall set sail and cast anchor*' could be understood as an independent sentence with a subject and a predicate, meaning 'Its sailing and its anchoring are in the Name of Allah.' It is narrated that whenever Noah wanted the Ark to sail, he would say *In the Name of Allah*,' and it would set sail; and when he wanted it to anchor, he would say '*In the Name of Allah*,' and it would anchor. Additionally, the name can be taken as an instrumental cause, like in the expression 'then as a greeting, peace be upon you both,' and by its sailing and anchoring are through God almighty.'

Al-Zamakhsharī continues: '*Majrā-hā* and *mursā-hā* have been recited with an 'a' sound in the beginning, derived from sailing and anchoring, and they could either be verbal nouns or refer to time or place. Mujāhid recited it as '*mujrī-hā*' and '*mursī-hā*', using the form of the active participle to denote these as attributes of God.'

وَهِيَ تَجْرِي بِهِمْ فِي مَوْجٍ كَالْجِبَالِ وَنَادَىٰ نُوحٌ ابْنَهُ وَكَانَ فِي مَعْزِلٍ يَا بُنَيَّ
ارْكَبْ مَعَنَا وَلَا تَكُنْ مَعَ الْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٤٢﴾

(11:42) *And it sailed along with them amid waves* (mawj) *like mountains. Noah called out to his son, who stood aloof, 'O my son! 'Board with us, and do not be with the faithless!'*

'It' here refers to the Ark. According to some scholars, the word *mawj* is used here for 'waves' either as a singular common noun or as the plural of *mawja*, which denotes a great mass of water that rises out of the ocean. This verse shows that the Ark was moving across the water's surface and was not submerged in the water like a whale, as some have suggested.

Noah called out to his son, who stood aloof* (*kāna fī ma'zil*), *'O my son! 'Board with us, and do not be with the faithless!': The term *ma'zil* is a noun of place conjugated from the verb *'azal*, which means 'to withdraw', as his son had isolated himself from his father and the community of the faithful and kept his distance from them. This is why the verse says that Noah 'called' (*nādā*) to his son, rather than simply stating that he 'said' (*qāla*) to him.

Therefore, the meaning is: 'Noah called to his son, who was in a secluded place far from them, and he said in his call: "O my son"'—the

diminutive and the possessive pronoun in *bunayy* conveying tenderness and compassion—"'board the Ark with us and do not be with the disbelievers, or you will share in their punishment as you have shared in their companionship and their refusal to board the Ark.'" Note that He did not say, 'do not be one of the disbelievers,' because he did not know of his son's hypocrisy, that he was not a believer except in word. Therefore, he urged him to board.

قَالَ سَآوِى إِلَىٰ جَبَلٍ يَعْصِمُنِى مِنَ الْمَاءِ ۚ قَالَ لَا عَاصِمَ الْيَوْمَ مِنْ أَمْرِ
اللَّهِ إِلَّا مَنْ رَحِمَ ۚ وَحَالَ بَيْنَهُمَا الْمَوْجُ فَكَانَ مِنَ الْمُغْرَقِينَ ﴿٤٣﴾

(11:43) *He said, 'I shall take refuge on* (āwī ilā) *a mountain; it will protect me from the flood.' He said, 'There is none today who can protect from Allah's edict, except someone upon whom He has mercy.' Then the waves came between them, and he was among those who were drowned.*

Al-Rāghib says: '*Ma'wā* ('refuge') is the infinitive of the verb *awā*. One says "I took refuge in such-and-such" (*awā ilā kadhā*) when one attaches oneself to something.'

Therefore, the meaning is: 'Noah's son replied to his father, rejecting his pleas to board the ark, by saying, "I will climb a mountain that will protect me and keep me above the water, so I won't drown." Noah said, "There is no protector today"—for it is a day on which God's wrath was severe, and He decreed the drowning of all earth's inhabitants except those who took refuge from God in Himself, and not with a mountain or anything else. Then the wave came between Noah and his son, so his son was among the drowned. If the wave hadn't come between them, and the conversation hadn't been interrupted, his disbelief would have become apparent and Noah would have disowned him in any case.'

The verse suggests that Noah and his people inhabited a mountainous region and that it was common for them to ascend these mountains.

وَقِيلَ يَا أَرْضُ ابْلَعِى مَاءَكِ وَيَا سَمَاءُ أَقْلِعِى وَغِيضَ الْمَاءُ وَقُضِىَ الْأَمْرُ
وَاسْتَوَتْ عَلَى الْجُودِىِّ ۖ وَقِيلَ بُعْدًا لِلْقَوْمِ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٤٤﴾

(11:44) *Then it was said, 'O earth, swallow* (iblaʿī) *your water! O*

sky, leave off (iqlaʿī)*!' The waters receded* (ghīḍa)*; the edict was carried out, and it settled on Judi. Then it was said, 'Away with the wrongdoing lot!'*

Balaʿ ('swallowing') literally refers to act of transporting something down the throat into the stomach, and *iqlāʿ* ('leaving off') means to desist from an action or stop something from its source. *Ghīḍ* denotes the earths absorption of moisture from its surface to its depths, similar to the concept of drying. When one says: 'The earth has absorbed the water', this means it has diminished its quantity.

Judi generally refers to a mountain or a piece of solid ground. It has said that this is the name of a mountain near Mosul, which is part of the mountain range extending to Armenia, known as Ararat.

Then it was said, 'O earth, swallow your water! O sky, leave off!'— This is a call that emanated from the domain of divine majesty and grandeur. Even though God is the speaker, His name is not explicitly mentioned, as this is intended to inspire reverence and awe. The commands in this verse are creative (*takwīnī*) in nature, akin to the divine command 'be!' that emanates from the Lord of the Throne. Such commands are carried out immediately and without delay, such that the earth will immediately absorb the water on its surface that had issued forth from its springs and the rain will immediately cease.

This indicates that both the earth and sky played a role in subduing the flood waters by the command of God, as explained in the verse, elsewhere: *and We made the earth burst forth with springs, and the waters met for a preordained purpose* (54:12).

The waters receded means that the flood waters diminished and dried up from the surface of the earth, revealing its expanse once again. Naturally, this occurs when all that can be gathered of water is accumulated in the lowlands, forming seas and lakes, and what is left on the rest of the plains evaporates.

The edict was carried out means that what God had promised to Noah regarding the punishment of his people transpired. The divine command was implemented by drowning them and cleansing the earth from their presence. This means that what God said was going to happen unfolded exactly as was foretold. The execution (*qaḍāʾ*) of the matter, as is said regarding the creation of a command and its issuance, is also said regarding

its implementation, enforcement, and realization in the external world. However, the divine decree (*qaḍā' ilāhī*) and lordly ordinance (*ḥukm rubūbī*), which is the very essence of external existence, are one and the same in terms of creation and enforcement. The only difference is in the manner of expression.

... and it settled on Judi—meaning that the Ark settled on a mountain, or specifically on one known as Mount Judi. This statement is supposed to serve as the conclusion to the story of what Noah and his companions experienced during the flood.

Then it was said, 'Away with the wrongdoing lot!': This means that God Almighty said, 'Be gone, wrongdoing people.' It denotes that they should be removed far away and, hence, banished from God's mercy and from dwelling in the above of His generosity. Notice again that even though God is the speaker of these words, His name is not explicitly mentioned, and—like the previous instance of this above—this is also to convey reverence and awe.

Furthermore, the use of the imperative form in the statement, *'Away with the wrongdoing lot!'* is like the previous two divine commands, when God said, *'O earth, swallow your water! O sky, leave off!'* Therefore, as a creative command, it describes exactly what God did with them in terms of drowning, disgracing them in this world, and rendering them at a loss in the Hereafter. From another perspective, this could be read as a legislative commandment (*amr tashrīʿī*) that arose due to their disobedient rejection of the divine command to have faith and do good deeds and as a recompense for the arrogance and presumption they showed towards God Almighty.

The use of the passive voice in the phrases, *Then it was said, 'O earth ...', the edict was carried out*, *Then it was said, 'Away with...'* conveys another meaning, namely that these great, astonishing, and awe-inspiring acts could only be accomplished by the One, the All-Dominant, who has no partner in His command. It is not necessary to say who spoke these words or did these things because the human mind cannot conceive of anyone else who could have possibly carried them out.

We can observe something similar to this regarding the phrase, *The waters receded*, where the agent of the verb—the earth—is also omitted, as well as in the phrase, *and it settled on Judi*, where the agent of the verb is

the Ark. Note also that the '*wrongdoing lot*' were not explicitly identified as Noah's people, nor were the survivors identified as Noah or those with him on the Ark. The verse achieves its amazing eloquence through the course of the story, which only involves a sky raining down, an earth bursting with springs and immersed in water, an ark sailing in its waves, a matter accomplished, and a wrongdoing people—who are Noah's people—and a divine command promising their destruction. If the water subsides, it is the earth that causes it to subside. If something settles and becomes stable, it is the Ark that settles on the earth. If it is said: *'O earth, swallow your water! O sky, leave off!'* and "*'Away with the wrongdoing lot!'* the speaker is none other than God Almighty and the wrongdoing people are those upon whom the punishment was decreed. If it is said: *the edict was carried out*, the executor is none other than God, and the edict is what He promised to Noah and forbade him to ask Him to reconsider, namely, their drowning. If it is said to the sky: '*leave off*' after the earth is told '*swallow your water*', what is meant is for it to withhold and contain its water.

Therefore, this verse exhibits a truly remarkable degree of conciseness while still maintaining the harmony between its various elements. This verse stands at a unique confluence of the miraculous eloquence of the Qur'an that astonishes the mind and amazes the intellect, even by the standards of the Qur'an, all of whose verses are miracles in their eloquence. It is for this reason that scholars of Arabic rhetoric and eloquence have taken a keen interest in the verse. They have delved into its depths and extracted as many of its pearls as they could reach. However, as they have admitted, their efforts have merely been like scooping a handful of water from an ocean or picking up a pebble from a mountain.

وَنَادَىٰ نُوحٌ رَّبَّهُ فَقَالَ رَبِّ إِنَّ ابْنِي مِنْ أَهْلِي وَإِنَّ وَعْدَكَ الْحَقُّ وَأَنْتَ أَحْكَمُ الْحَاكِمِينَ ﴿٤٥﴾

(11:45) *Noah called out to his Lord, and said, 'My Lord! My son is indeed from my family. Your promise is indeed true, and You are the fairest of all judges.'*

This verse portrays Noah's supplication for his son who did not board the Ark. Noah's last encounter with him was on the day he boarded the Ark. He found his son isolated and called to him, pleading with him to

board the Ark, but his son refused. Then a wave came between them. Noah, seeing his son as a believer in God, considered him part of his family whom God had promised to save.

Driven by a deep longing and sorrow for his son, Noah raised his voice to God in supplication, as indicated by God's words: *Noah called out to his Lord*. The text does not say he 'asked', 'said', or 'prayed', but rather he 'called', which reflects the outcry of a desperate person facing intense distress—a natural reaction in such circumstances. This supplication, that is, Noah's plea to his Lord for his son, though mentioned after the account of the people's drowning and apparently after the settling of the Ark, likely occurred immediately after the wave came between them. Therefore, the fact that it is mentioned after the account of the flood's end serves to complete the narrative of this tremendous event, and to set the stage for the discussion of its remaining aspects.

Now, it is important to note that Noah was not only a prophet, but one of the resolute, who knew God, recognized his Lord's position, and was fully aware of his role as a divine servant. He had just witnessed firsthand the clear manifestation of the signs of God's lordship and divine governance in the form of the flood and the drowning of the world and its people. The wrongdoers had been banished from the stage of arrogance and pride. Yet, even in these circumstances, Noah made his supplication for his son. In keeping with prophetic decorum, he did not explicitly ask for his son's salvation, but instead, presented his words as an inquiry into the truth of the matter. He started by recalling God's promise of his family's safety when he was commanded to gather the survivors on the Ark. Recall that God had told him: *Carry in it a pair of every kind, along with your family*.

Now, with the exception of his wife, Noah's family, including even his son, had outwardly professed belief in him. If this son were not a believer as Noah saw him, he would not have called him to board the Ark at all. For it was Noah who had explicitly called for the disbelievers to be purged from the earth when he said: *'My Lord! Do not leave on the earth any inhabitant from among the faithless!'* The fact that he said this while calling his son to board the Ark shows that Noah considered this son to be a believer. His disobedience to his father's command to board the Ark was not itself an act of disbelief (*kufr*) nor tantamount to it, but was merely a sin (*maʿṣiya*),

which falls short of total disbelief.

It was in light of this that Noah said, '*My Lord! My son is indeed from my family. Your promise is indeed true* (wa inna waʿdaka al-ḥaqq) ...'—he recalled the promise of his Lord to deliver his family and added that his son was part of his family. The fact that he invokes God as 'Lord' (*rabb*) indicates that this is an appeal for divine mercy; the fact that he uses the possessive pronoun 'my' in '*my son*' and '*my family*' is to demonstrate his argument; while the use of the preposition *inna* ('indeed') and the definite article (*al-*) in *Your promise is indeed true* show that his faith in God is genuine.

Now, placing the two statements, '*My son is indeed from my family*' and '*indeed, Your promise is true*', side-by-side, imply that his son should have survived the flood. However, note that Noah, as a divine servant, shows humility towards God by not explicitly drawing this conclusion. Indeed, judgement belongs only to God. Therefore, instead of this, Noah simply presented these two statements and surrendered to God's judgement and decision in this regard, concluding his argument by saying, '*and You are the fairest of all judges*.'

Therefore, the meaning of the verse is: 'My Lord! My son is indeed part of my family and, indeed, your promise is absolutely true, which suggests that he should not have been drowned with the others! However, true judgement belongs only to You, for you are the fairest of all judges.' It seems that Noah was seeking clarification of the truth of the matter. He did not say anything about his son's survival, nor did he add anything to what God had recounted about him. An explanation of this will follow.

In God's words: "He said, 'O Noah, indeed he is not of your family; indeed, he is (one whose) work was other than righteous, so ask Me not for that about which you have no knowledge.'" God clarified the correct position to Noah regarding what he had said: "indeed my son is of my family, and indeed, Your promise is true," which implied the survival of his son. God replied: "indeed he is not of your family," thus refuting his argument.

قَالَ يَا نُوحُ إِنَّهُ لَيْسَ مِنْ أَهْلِكَ ۖ إِنَّهُ عَمَلٌ غَيْرُ صَالِحٍ ۖ فَلَا تَسْأَلْنِ مَا
لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ ۖ إِنِّي أَعِظُكَ أَنْ تَكُونَ مِنَ الْجَاهِلِينَ ﴿٤٦﴾

(11:46) *Said He, 'O Noah! Indeed He is not of your family. Indeed*

he is unrighteous conduct. So do not ask Me that of which you have no knowledge. I advise you lest you should be among the ignorant.'

Here, God clarified the correct position to Noah regarding what he had said: *My son is indeed from my family. Your promise is indeed true,* which implied that his son should have survived. God responded to this by saying: " *Indeed He is not of your family*, thus rebuffing this argument.

What is meant by him not being of Noah's family is that he was not included amongst those whom God had promised to save. This is because, when God said, *along with your family—except those against whom the edict has already been given*, this refers only to the righteous members of his family (*except those against whom the edict has already been given*), and Noah's son was not righteous. Therefore, even if he was Noah's son and part of his family in the common sense of the word, he was not amongst the family whom God had promised to save. This is why God explains his saying, '*Indeed He is not of your family'*, by saying, '*Indeed he is unrighteous conduct.*'

Now some have argued against this reading because they say it would mean that Noah's disbelieving wife should included under the rubric of family (*ahl*) because she was also excluded from the above promise by exception while actually being a member of his family. On the other hand, it would mean that Noah's son was not actually part of his family because he was excluded in fact rather than by the above exception, which is extremely incongruous.

To this, I would respond by saying that what is meant by 'family' in the phrase, *along with your family—except those against whom the edict has already been given*, are his family in the sense of his nearest and dearest, with the exception of '*those against whom the edict has already been given*' who are the unrighteous. The referents of this exception are Noah's wife and son. However, what is meant by 'family' in the phrase, *Indeed He is not of your family* are the righteous ones amongst his nearest and dearest. This is in line with Noah's plea, '*My Lord! My son is indeed from my family*.' When Noah says 'my family' here, he would not have meant anyone except the righteous amongst those related to him, otherwise this would have also included his wife, which would have nullified his argument at the outset. Therefore, 'family' in the the latter verse is being used in a more specific sense than in the former.

This is the apparent meaning of the verse, and there are reports from the Imāms of the Prophet's Household in support of this reading, which we will discuss in our treatment of the narrations, below.

Other explanations that have been suggested with regard to the verse are as follows:

One is that the intention is that his son is not of his religion, implying that his disbelief precludes him from having the rulings of his family applied to him. This reading is attributed to a group of commentators, and it does not suffer from any fundamental flaws, except that it does not accord with the context of the verse. This is because God denies Noah's son belonging with him in the same sense as Noah affirms it. Noah did not mean by his belonging that he was a believer and not a disbeliever, but rather that he belonged to him in the sense of being both one of his nearest and dearest and being righteousness, even if faith was a prerequisite of this. Therefore, this ultimately refers back to the reading we have presented above.

Another explanation is that he was not his son in reality, but only born in his house. Thus, Noah said, '*My son is indeed from my family*' based on outward appearances, and God informed him that the matter was contrary to this, alerting him to his wife's infidelity. This explanation is attributed to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Mujāhid.

The problem with this explanation is, first of all, the fact that it associates shame and disgrace with one of God's prophets and the general sense of the Qur'an precludes such a possibility. In the Qur'an, God repels such dishonor from the vicinity of the prophets and exonerates them from association with such falsehoods. More than this however, this explanation suffers from the fact that there is no evidence for it in the language used in the verse. There is nothing in the story other than God's statement: *O Noah! Indeed He is not of your family. Indeed he is unrighteous conduct*, which does not provide any clear support for such conjectures. Moreover, in reference to this theory about Noah's wife, some might cite the verse, *Allah draws an example for the faithless: the wife of Noah and the wife of Lot. They were under two of our righteous servants, yet they betrayed them* (66:10). However, this verse only indicates that they were disbelievers, enemies of their husbands, revealing their secrets, and aiding the disbelievers against them, nothing more than that.

Another reading suggests that the son belonged to Noah's wife but was his stepson, rather than his biological one. However, once again, there is no textual evidence to support such an interpretation. It also does not fit with God's justification that he is not of Noah's family because '*he is unrighteous conduct*.' If this were the case, it would be more appropriate to say that he is the son of the wife.

Moreover, if this was indeed the case, it is highly unlikely that Noah was not aware that the boy was his stepson, not his biological son, when he addressed God saying, *My son is indeed from my family*, or that he was aware of this and used a metaphorical language to argue with God, who is All-Knowing and All-Wise. This then prompted God to clarify that he was not his son, but his stepson.

As for the statement, *Indeed he is unrighteous conduct*, the context suggests that the pronoun refers to Noah's son, who is the '*unrighteous conduct*'—this seems like an odd phrasing on first glance. However, describing him as an '*unrighteous act*' is a kind of hyperbole similar to saying 'Zayd is justice,' meaning that Zayd is the personification of justice. An analogous statement is, 'it is just a coming and a going' which implies that it is characterized by coming and going.

Thus, the meaning is: 'This son of yours is characterized by unrighteousness and therefore is not among your family whom I promised to save.' This reading is also supported by those who read it as meaning, '*Indeed he is unrighteous conduct*,' in the past tense, meaning 'he has done an unrighteous act.'

Some have argued that the pronoun refers back to Noah's implicit request in the statement, *'My Lord! My son is indeed from my family*.' In other words, asking for your son's salvation is an unrighteous act because it is a request for something of which you have no knowledge, and it is not befitting for a prophet to address God in this way.

However, this is among the most foolish of interpretations because it does not fit with either of the sentences that surround it: '*Indeed He is not of your family*' and '*So do not ask Me that of which you have no knowledge*.' It is clear that if this were the case, it would have been more appropriate for God to mention this first in response to Noah's statement, and not after '*Indeed He is not of your family*.'

Moreover, an observant reader will have noticed that when Noah said,

'*My Lord! My son is indeed from my family …*', this was not posed as a question. Rather, if he had continued speaking, this would have led to a question, but God's special concern for Noah intervened to prevent him from asking it.

So do not ask Me that of which you have no knowledge: When Noah said, '*My Lord! My son is indeed from my family. Your promise is indeed true*', he was on the verge of asking God to deliver his son from the flood, not realizing that his son was not, in fact, part of his family. It was at this point that God's special concern for Noah intervened, and supernatural guidance prevented him from asking the question, as he was apprehended by the prohibition, *So do not ask Me that of which you have no knowledge*. This divine prohibition followed logically from what God had already said. In other words: 'Insofar as your son is not of your family because he is the personification of unrighteous conduct, and you have no way to know this, you should refrain from asking prematurely for his salvation. For it is a question about something you do not know.'

However, just because God forbade Noah from asking something without knowledge, this does not entail that Noah had, in fact, asked this of God, whether separately or within his statement, *My Lord! My son is indeed from my family*.' After all, a prohibition does not imply that the prohibited act has already been committed. For example, elsewhere, God says, *Do not extend your glance toward what We have provided to certain groups of them* (15:88). In this verse, God prohibited the Prophet from desiring this worldly life and being captivated by its beauty, even though he was far above doing so.

On the contrary, in order for it to be valid, a prohibition only requires the possibility that the subject of the prohibition could commit the prohibited action. The prophets, despite their divine infallibility and supernatural guidance, are still subject to this. Indeed, part of their infallibility and guidance is that God watches over their actions. Whenever they approach something that could potentially lead to an error, He guides them to the correct path and calls them to adhere to the way of divine servanthood. As God said, *Had We not fortified you, certainly you might have inclined toward them a bit. Then We would have surely made you taste a double (punishment) in this life and a double (punishment) after death, and then you would have not found for yourself any helper against Us* (17:74). Thus,

God informed us that He is the one who made the Prophet steadfast and did not allow him to even approach such an inclination, let alone act upon it. God also said, *Were it not for Allah's grace and His mercy on you, a group of them were bent on leading you astray; but they do not mislead anyone except themselves, and they cannot do you any harm. Allah has sent down to you the Book and wisdom, and He has taught you what you did not know, and great is Allah's grace upon you* (4:113).

A further piece of evidence that the phrase, *So do not ask Me ...,* serves as a warning against an act that has not yet transpired can be found in Prophet Noah's response after hearing it. He invokes God, saying, "'*My Lord! I seek Your protection lest I should ask You* (rabbi innī aʿūdhu bi-ka an as'alaka...) *something of which I have no knowledge. If You do not forgive me and have mercy upon me I shall be among the losers.'* If Noah had already asked something along these lines, he would have said: 'I seek refuge you in You from having asked that' (*aʿūdhu bi-ka min su'ālī dhālik*) Using this construction would have implied that the act had already taken place.

Yet another piece of evidence that Noah did not ask God with regards to his son is in the refrain that follows the prohibition, '*So do not ask Me that of which you have no knowledge*', where God says, '*I advise you lest you should be among the ignorant.*' In other words, God says, 'Indeed I advise you lest you should be among the ignorant by asking such a question.' If Noah had already asked that question, he would have already been classified as one of the ignorant, because he would have asked about something he did not understand.

Now, one might argue that the phrase '*lest you should be among the ignorant*' refers to those in whom ignorance is an established trait, and that this can only be established through repeatedly acting in a foolish and ignorant manner, rather than merely through a single instance of this. Therefore, it can be inferred that Noah did indeed ask such a question once, and God warned him not to repeat it lest he fall into the category of the ignorant.

To this, I would respond as follows: The application of the an active participle such as 'ignorant' (*jāhil*) to a person does not necessarily indicate a recurrent or habitual state, but can also denote a temporary condition. This is evidenced by God's words in the story of the Cow: *And when Moses said to his people, 'Indeed Allah commands you to slaughter a cow,'*

they said, 'Do you take us in derision?' He said, 'I seek Allah's protection lest I should be one of the ignorant (an akūna min al-jāhilīn)*!'* (2:67) and in the story of Joseph: '*If You do not turn away their schemes from me, then I will incline towards them and become one of the ignorant* (wa akun min al-jāhilīn)*'* (12:33). Also, God's decree to His Prophet reads: " *Had Allah wished, He would have brought them together on guidance. So do not be one of the ignorant* (6:35).

Also, if the aim of the warning was to prevent Noah from repeating the question after he had asked it once, it would have been more appropriate for God to explicitly prohibit him from returning to such questioning, rather than prohibiting the original question. This is similar to the admonishment mentioned in the verse: *When you were receiving it on your tongues, and were mouthing something of which you had no knowledge ... Allah advises you lest you should ever repeat the like of it, should you be faithful* (24:17).

قَالَ رَبِّ إِنِّي أَعُوذُ بِكَ أَنْ أَسْأَلَكَ مَا لَيْسَ لِي بِهِ عِلْمٌ ۖ وَإِلَّا تَغْفِرْ لِي وَتَرْحَمْنِي أَكُنْ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ ﴿٤٧﴾

(11:47) ***He said, 'My Lord! I seek Your protection lest I should ask You something of which I have no knowledge. If You do not forgive me and have mercy upon me I shall be among the losers.'***

In light of Noah's realization that had God's intervention not prevented him, he would have asked about something of which he had no knowledge and thereby would have fallen into ignorance, he expressed gratitude to God. He sought refuge in God's forgiveness and mercy from asking such a loss-incurring question, saying, *My Lord! I seek Your protection lest I should ask You something of which I have no knowledge...*'

The discussion of seeking protection from destructive matters and grave sins that have not yet transpired is similar to that of the prohibition of sins and wrongdoings that have not yet occurred, which we have discussed already. Consider the fact that God commanded His Prophet to seek refuge from Satan, even though he was infallible and, therefore, impervious to Satan's influence. As mentioned in the Qur'an: *Say, 'I seek the protection of the Lord of humans... from the evil of the sneaky tempter, who puts temptations into the breasts of humans'* (114:5). He also commanded him: *And say,*

'My Lord! I seek Your protection from the promptings of devils; and I seek Your protection, my Lord, from their presence near me.' (23:97–98). This is even thought the revelation is already protected from Satan's touch, as explicitly stated in the Qur'an: '*Knower of the Unseen, He does not disclose His Unseen to anyone, except to an messenger He approves of. Then He dispatches a sentinel before and behind him so that He may ascertain that they have communicated the messages of their Lord*' (Surah Al-Jinn, 28).

At first glance, Noah's statement, '*If You do not forgive me and have mercy upon me I shall be among the losers*', appears to be a plea of repentance. However, in essence, it is actually an expression of gratitude for God granting him knowledge and discipline.

As for the form of his repentance, it denotes a return to God by seeking refuge in Him and seeking His forgiveness and mercy, which refers to when He covers man's faults and protects him from ruin. This also includes God's all-encompassing concern for his wellbeing. We have previously explained at the end of the sixth part of the book that the meaning of 'sin' (*dhanb*) is broader in scope than merely contravening a legal ordinance; it refers to every ill-effect or harm inflicted by the human being. By the same token, forgiveness is broader than merely covering what are commonly considered sins; it encompasses every divine covering that grants a person felicity and brings about harmony in their life.

The essence of Noah's gratitude is fixed upon God's special concern, which prevented him from asking a question that would have made him among the ignorant and which protected him by showing him the correct course of action. This divine covering over a slip in his path, and the mercy and blessings bestowed upon him by God, was expressed in his statement, '*If You do not forgive me and have mercy upon me I shall be among the losers*', meaning if You do not protect me from mistakes, I will be surely be one of the losers. Therefore, this is an expression of praise and thanksgiving for God's benevolent act.

قِيلَ يَا نُوحُ اهْبِطْ بِسَلَامٍ مِنَّا وَبَرَكَاتٍ عَلَيْكَ وَعَلَىٰ أُمَمٍ مِمَّنْ مَعَكَ ۚ وَأُمَمٌ سَنُمَتِّعُهُمْ ثُمَّ يَمَسُّهُمْ مِنَّا عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿٤٨﴾

(11:48) *It was said, 'O Noah! Disembark in peace* (bi-salām) *from Us and with blessings upon you and upon nations from those who*

are with you, and nations whom We shall provide for, then a painful punishment from Us shall befall them.'

Salām ('peace') here denotes either safety or a greeting. However, mentioning the affliction of punishment at the end of the verse supports the idea that *salām* at its beginning refers to safety from punishment. Similarly, replacing the blessing at the end of the verse with provision suggests that the intended blessings are not merely favors and enjoyments of life, but divine favors in terms of guiding man towards goodness, happiness, and a praiseworthy outcome.

As we have already seen previously, the verse does not mention who spoke, only *It was said*. The speaker, of course, is God, but the passive voice is used here to inspire awe and reverence.

'O Noah! Disembark in peace from Us and with blessings upon you ...': This means: 'O Noah! Disembark safe from punishment of the flood and showered with abundant goodness and blessings from Us.' Alternatively, it could mean: 'Descend with our greeting and showered with our blessings.'

The phrase, '*... and upon nations from those who are with you ...*' is linked with the previous phrase, '*... upon you*.' The fact that the word nations (*umam*) is kept indefinite implies the vastness of their number, as some of these will be mentioned by God in his subsequent statement, '*... and nations whom We shall provide for ...*'

This address, by which I mean His statement, *'O Noah! Disembark in peace from Us and with blessings upon you...*' until the end of the verse, can be read with respect to the original situation at the time it was issued. At that time, no human or animal was alive on the earth; all had been drowned. Only a small group remained on the Ark, which had come to rest on Mount Judi. They were destined to disembark from the Ark and onto earth, to repopulate it and live on it for a while.

However, it can also be read as a general address that applies to all human beings, from the time of their emergence from the Ark till the Day of Resurrection, similar to God's address when Adam was sent down from the Garden to earth, when He said: *We said, 'Get down, being enemies of one another! On the earth shall be your abode and sustenance for a time ... Get down from it, all together! Yet, should any guidance come to you from Me, those who follow My guidance shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve. But those who are faithless and deny Our signs, they shall be the inmates of*

the Fire and they shall remain in it forever' (2:39). And elsewhere in the Qur'an, He says, *He said, 'In it you will live, and in it you will die; and from it you will be raised*' (7:25).

Therefore, this is a second address, similar to the first one that was directed to Noah and to the believers who were with him—from whom all the humans of the world today are descended—concerning them and the descendants who will come after them until the Day of Resurrection. It contains the appointed conditions of their earthly life, and the permission for their descent to it, their settling on it, and their finding refuge in it.

God has divided these beings granted this permission into two categories. His permission for one group is expressed through peace and blessings, namely Noah and the nations with him, and for another group it is expressed through enjoyment, followed by the affliction of punishment. The terms '*peace*' and '*blessings*' are inseparable from the glad tidings of prosperity and happiness for those to whom they are linked.

From this, it is clear that the command to disembark contained in this verse, along with the associated peace, blessings, and enjoyment, is directed at all humans from the time the occupants of the Ark descended until the Day of Resurrection. This is parallel to the decree to descend from the Garden that was directed to Adam and his wife. In this command, there is permission to live an earthly life, a promise of reward for those who obey God, and a warning of punishment for those who disobey Him. The same can be seen in the earlier decree, fitting perfectly with it.

Thus, it is clear that the phrase, '*and upon nations from those who are with you*' refers to the righteous nations from the occupants of the Ark and those of their descendants who will emerge as righteous. It appears that '*from those*' in His phrase '*from those who are with you*' means not that there were literal nations with Noah on the Ark but that these nations would begin with those who were with him on it (thereby still including those individuals in those nations). Therefore, the meaning is: '... and upon those nations whose beginning is from those who are with you', and they are the occupants of the Ark and the righteous members of their descendants.

This explanation implies that all the occupants of the Ark are destined to be felicitous and saved in the Hereafter. The context certainly supports this reading, as the occupants of the Ark have already been purified by trials and have given preference to the blessings that come from God over

the adornments of worldly life. Indeed, God twice confirmed their faith during the story when He said, '*except those who already have faith*' (11:36), and He said, '*And none believed with him except a few*' (11:40).

The passage '*... and nations whom We shall provide for then a painful punishment from Us shall befall them*' appears to be the subject of a nominal sentence whose predicate is left implicit, its meaning being: 'And of those with you will come *nations whom ...*' or 'And there are *nations whom ...*' Notice that God has excluded these nations from those being given His permission to swell upon the earth. He does not say, for example: '... and provisions for other nations who will be punished.' This is to remove them from the position of honor and respect that He has accorded to the righteous. Therefore, He informs Noah and those with him that there will be other nations for whom He will provide and then He will punish, and these nations are not granted the same permission to dispose of the provisions of this worldly life that God has granted to the righteous out of His generosity and kindness.

Note also that this verse contains many features that magnify and extol the status speaker, such as the use of the passive voice for *It was said*, addressing Noah by name in the order to disembark, and speaking in the first-person plural ('We') when saying '*We shall provide for*' and *'a painful punishment from Us*', and so on.

It also becomes evident that the explanation of His phrase, '*and upon nations from those who are with you*' as meaning 'upon nations from the offspring of those with you' is not appropriate, given that it implicitly excludes those with Noah from the address (while our reading above includes them in those nations). Similarly, the claim that 'nations' (*umam*) refers to all the animals that were with Noah because God has bestowed blessings upon them as well, is likewise evidently flawed.

تِلْكَ مِنْ أَنۢبَآءِ ٱلْغَيْبِ نُوحِيهَآ إِلَيْكَ ۖ مَا كُنتَ تَعْلَمُهَآ أَنتَ وَلَا قَوْمُكَ
مِن قَبْلِ هَٰذَا ۖ فَٱصْبِرْ ۖ إِنَّ ٱلْعَٰقِبَةَ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٤٩﴾

(11:49) *These are accounts of the Unseen which We reveal to you. Neither you nor your people used to know them before this. So be patient. Indeed the outcome will be in favor of the Godwary.*

This refers to these stories or this particular story that are part of the

Unseen knowledge revealed to the Prophet

Neither you nor your people used to know them before this—means that while this story is absolutely true and correct, it was unknown to the Prophet and his people before this, while the version preserved with the People of the Book has been distorted and turned away from the truth, as will be evident to anyone who reads the account of Noah in the Torah.

So be patient. Indeed the outcome will be in favor of the Godwary: This is the moral drawn from the contents of the story. In other words: 'When you know what happened to Noah and his people, including the destruction of his people and his survival along with the believers who were with him, and how God granted them inheritance of the earth because of their patience, and how Noah was victorious over his enemies because of his patience, then you must likewise be patient and steadfast for the truth, because the best outcome is for the righteous. They are the ones who are patient in the service of God, the Most Exalted.'

Examining Narrations

(1) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Ishāq b. Bishr and Ibn ʿAsākir report from Ibn ʿAbbās, who said: 'Indeed, Noah would be beaten and then wrapped in a cloth. He would be thrown into his house, and his assailants assumed he was dead. Then he would emerge and call them to monotheism again until he despaired of his people ever believing in him. A man came to him with his son, leaning on a stick, and said, "O my son, look at this old man, do not let him deceive you." The son said, "O Father, give me your stick." He then took the stick and said, "Put me on the ground." He put him down, then he walked towards Noah, hit him and wounded him, causing blood to pour from his head.

Noah said: "O Lord, you see what your servants are doing to me. If You need them, guide them, otherwise grant me patience until You judge. You are the best of judges." Then God revealed to him that no believers remained among the men and women. God said, "O Noah, *None of your people will believe except those who already have faith; so do not lament for what they used to do. Build the Ark* Noah asked, "O Lord, what is the Ark?" He replied, "It is a wooden structure that floats on water. I will drown the people

who disobeyed Me and cleanse My earth from them." Noah asked, "O Lord, where is the water?" God replied, "I have power to do whatever I will."'

(2) In *al-Kāfī*, al-Kulaynī narrates via his chain of transmission that al-Mufaḍḍal said: 'I was with Abū ʿAbd Allāh in Kūfa when Abū al-ʿAbbās (the first ʿAbbāsid caliph) entered the city. When we reached al-Kināsa, he said, "Here my uncle Zayd was crucified, may God have mercy on him." Then he proceeded until we reached the arch of olive vendors market, which is at the end of the lamp-makers street. He stopped and said, "Descend, for this is the site of the first mosque of Kūfa, which Adam had marked out. I dislike entering it on horseback." I asked, "Who changed its layout?" He said, "Firstly, the Flood during Noah's time. Then the associates of Khusraw and al-Nuʿmān altered it, then Ziyād b. Abī Sufyān altered it again." I asked, "Was Kūfa and its mosque present during Noah's time?" He said to me: "Yes, O Mufaḍḍal. Noah and his people lived in a village by the Euphrates, west of Kūfa." He continued: "Noah was a carpenter and then God exalted him and made him a prophet. Noah was the first to make a ship that floated on water. He said, "Noah stayed with his people for 950 years, calling them to God Almighty, but they mocked and ridiculed him. When he saw this, he cursed them and said, *'My Lord! Do not leave on the earth any inhabitant from among the faithless. If You leave them, they will lead astray Your servants and will not beget except vicious ingrates'* (71:26–27). Then God revealed to Noah to build the Ark, to enlarge it and hasten in its construction. So, Noah built the Ark at the mosque of Kūfa with his own hands and brought wood until it was finished."'

Al-Mufaḍḍal said: 'Abū ʿAbd Allāh paused his discourse at noon. Abū ʿAbd Allāh stood, prayed Ẓuhr and ʿAsr, then left the mosque. He turned to his left and pointed to the site of Dār al-Dārayn, the house of Ibn Ḥakīm, which is where the Euphrates currently flows. He said, "O Mufaḍḍal, here is where the idols of Noah's people: Yaghūth, Yaʿūq, and Nasr were erected." Then he continued walking until he mounted his ride.

I asked: "May I be your sacrifice! How long did Noah take to build

his ship?" He replied, "He did it in two cycles (*dawrayn*)." I asked, "And how long is a cycle (*dawr*)?" He replied, "Eighty years." I asked, "But the masses say he worked on it for five hundred years?" He said, "No. How? And God says: ...*by Our revelation*..." I asked, "Tell me about the saying of God, *When Our edict came and the oven gushed*... Where was this place? And how was it?" He replied, "The oven was in the house of a believing old woman, in the direction of the *qibla* on the right side of the mosque." I asked him, "Where is that?" He said, "The location is the corner of *Bāb al-Fīl* (the Elephant Gate) today."

Then I asked him, "Did the water start gushing out from that oven?" He replied, "Yes. Indeed, God wanted to show the people of Noah a sign, then God sent rain upon them, it flooded the land and all the springs overflowed as well, and God drowned them. And saved Noah and those with him in the Ark."

Author's comment: The narration is lengthy and not related to the explanation of the verse, but we mention it here as an exemplar of many of the narrations that have come down with the same sort of content from both Shi'a and Sunni sources, and it will aid us in our understanding of the stories of the verses by referring to these narrations.

The narration also suggests a certain amount of urgency in the construction of the Ark, alluding to the divine commandment, '*Build the Ark before Our eyes and by Our revelation*' In this narration, the Umayyad governor Ziyād b. Abīh (lit. 'Ziyād the son of his father') is acknowledged as the son of Abū Sufyān. However, the name used in the original words of the Imam is 'Ziyād', without mentioning any parent, to which 'ibn Abū Sufyān' has been added by some narrators.

(3) In the same source, there is a narration from Abū Razīn al-Asadī, who narrates from the Commander of the Faithful, who recounts: 'Indeed, Noah finished constructing the Ark and the appointed sign from his Lord for the annihilation of his people was the overflow of the oven. This oven was in a woman's house and when it overflowed, she reported it. Noah came to the oven and sealed it. The water rose, and those who wanted to enter the Ark did so, and those who wanted to leave, left. Then he came to its seal and removed it, God says: *Then We opened the gates of the sky with*

pouring waters, and We made the earth burst forth with springs, and the waters met for a preordained purpose. We bore him on a vessel made of planks and nails (54:11–13).

The narrator adds: 'Noah's shipyard was in the centre of your mosque. And indeed, seven hundred cubits have been deducted from its length.'

Author's comment: The overflowing of the oven being a sign for him through which he knew the imminence of the flood, is confirmed in several narrations from both Shi'a and Sunni sources, and the context of the verse, *When Our edict came and the oven gushed*, clearly indicates that it was an sign appointed by God for Noah.

(4) In the same source, there is a narration with a chain of transmission from Ismā'īl al-Ju'fī from Abū Ja'far al-Bāqir (a.s.,) who said: 'The law of Noah was to worship God with monotheism and devotion and to abandon the worship of idols, which is the natural disposition (*fiṭra*) upon which people were created. God took a covenant from Noah and the prophets to worship God, the Blessed and Exalted, and not associate anything with Him, and He commanded prayer, enjoining good and forbidding evil, and to observe the lawful and the unlawful, but no penal laws or inheritance laws were imposed upon him. This was his code of laws. Noah stayed among his people for 950 years, inviting them to his way both secretly and openly. When they refused and persisted in their ways, he said, "My Lord, *I have been overcome, so help*" (54:10). God the Mighty and Majestic revealed to him, "*None of your people will believe except those who already have faith; so do not lament for what they used to do.*" (11:36) This refers to Noah's saying, "*If You leave them, they will lead astray Your servants and will not beget except vicious ingrates*" (71:27) So, God revealed to him, "*Build the Ark ...*"'

Author's comment: al-'Ayyāshī also narrates this from al-Ju'fī and the narration apparently indicates that he made two supplications against his people; the first one being his saying, "My Lord, *I have been overcome, so help*" (54:10) which is in Sūrah al-Qamar, and the second one after God caused him lose hope in his people ever believing, which is his saying, "*'My Lord! Do not leave on the earth any inhabitant from among the faithless. If*

You leave them, they will lead astray Your servants and will not beget except vicious ingrates' (71:26–27), which is in Sūrah Nūḥ.

(5) In *Maʿānī al-Akhbār*, al-Ṣadūq narrates via his chain of transmission from Ḥumrān from Abī Ja'far al-Bāqir regarding God's saying, *And none believed with him except a few*, that he said: 'They were eight in number.'

Author's comment: al-ʿAyyāshī also narrates this from Ḥumrān, from him, and people have expressed other opinions regarding their number: six, seven, ten, seventy-two, eighty, but there is no evidence for any of these.

(6) In *ʿUyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*, al-Ṣadūq transmits via his chain of narrators from ʿAbd al-Salām b. Ṣāliḥ al-Harawī that Imām al-Riḍā said: 'When Noah descended to earth, Noah, his sons, and those who followed him were eighty souls in total. He built a village where he landed and named it 'The Village of Eighty.'

Author's comment: There is no contradiction between the two narrations as it is possible that apart from the eight, there were others from the family of Noah, and he had lived for almost a thousand years by then.

(7) In the same source, with a chain of narration from al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī al-Washā' from Imām al-Riḍā: 'I heard him say: my father said: Abū ʿAbd Allāh: "Indeed, God, exalted and majestic, said to Nūḥ: *Indeed He is not of your family* ' because he was an opponent to him, and He counted those who followed him his family instead." Then he asked me: "How do the people recite this verse about the son of Noah?" So, I said: "people recite it in two ways: 'this is an unrighteous deed,' and 'he is the result of an unrighteous deed." He said: "They lie, he is his son, but God denied him being from him when he opposed him in his religion.'"

Author's comment: perhaps when he says, 'and He counted those who followed him his family instead' this is a reference to the verse: *We responded to him and delivered him and his family from the great agony* (21:76). As it appears that what is meant by his family is everyone who was saved with him.

When, in this tradition, the Imam asks, 'how do the people recite this verse...?', he is, in fact, asking how they explain its meaning. Therefore, the two recitations mentioned refer to the explanations that Noah's wife bore the son from someone else but claimed it was his. For this reason, some

have recited the verse, 'Noah called out to her son.' They attribute this recitation to ʿAlī and some of the Imams from his descendants.

(8) In al-Kashāf, al-Zamakhsharī writes: '... and ʿAlī, may God be pleased with him, recited it as "her son" (*ibna-hā*), and the pronoun refers to his wife. Muḥammad b. ʿAlī and ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr recited it as *ibna-ha*, with a *fatḥa* on the *ha* (instead of an *alif*), which was a contraction of *ibna-hā* ("her son" instead of "his son"). This supports the school of thought of al-Ḥasan. Qatāda said: "I asked him and he said: 'by God, he was not his son.' So I said: "But God quotes him as saying: '*My son is indeed from my family* ', and you are saying he was not his son, and the People of the Book do not disagree that he was his son!" At this point, he said: "Who takes their religion from the People of the Book?" and he adduced as evidence the fact that Noah said "*from my family*", rather than "from me."'

Author's comment: This is a nonsensical argument because, as we have already seen, God promised Noah that He would save his family (*ahl*). He did not promise to save those who were 'from him.' If he had, then Noah would have said to God, 'My son is indeed from me' when he asked Him about his salvation. Moreover, we have already explained how the wording of verses does not permit such a reading.

Regarding the claim that there is no disagreement among the People of the Book about Noah's son, this is questionable, because the Torah does not tell us anything about the son of Noah who drowned.

(9) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, al-Suyūṭī narrates from Ibn al-Anbārī's *Maṣāḥif* and Abū al-Shaykh, both of whom narrated from ʿAlī that he recited the verse: 'And Noah called her son (*ibna-hā*).'

(10) In the same source, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, and Abū al-Shaykh narrate from Abī Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. ʿAlī about the verse, *Noah called out to his son* (11:42): 'It was not his son but the son of his wife, and this is spoken in Arabic in the dialect of the Tayy tribe.'

Author's comment: al-ʿAyyāshī reported this in his *Tafsīr* from Muḥammad b. Muslim.

(11) In *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, it is narrated from Mūsā, from al-ʿAlā' b. Sayāba from Imām al-Ṣādiq regarding the verse, *Noah called out*

to his son: It was not his son but the son of his wife, and in the language of Tayy, they call the son of a man's wife "his son."'

(12) In the same source, it is narrated from Zurāra from Imām al-Bāqir regarding Noah's saying, '*O my son! Board with us* ...' that he said: 'He was not his son.' Zurāra asked, 'But then why did Noah say, "*O my son*"?' He replied: 'Indeed, Noah said that, but he did not know.'

Author's comment: The most reliable of the above reports is the one narrated by al-Washshā' from Imām al-Riḍā.

(13) In the same source, from Ibrāhīm b. Abī al-'Alā' from either Imām al-Bāqir or Imām al-Ṣādiq: 'When God said: *"O earth, swallow your water! O sky, leave off!"*, the earth said: "I was commanded to swallow only my water, and I was not commanded to swallow the water of the sky." So the earth swallowed its own water, and the water of the sky remained and became a sea surrounding the world."'

(14) In the same source, it is narrated from Abū Baṣīr, from Imām Mūsā al-Kāẓim, in a tradition mentioning Mount Judi: 'It is a mountain near Mosul.'

(15) In the same source, it is narrated from al-Mufaḍḍal b. 'Umar, from Imām al-Ṣādiq: '...*and it settled on Judi*—it is the Euphrates at Kufa.'

Author's comment: This narration is supported by others.

(16) In the same source, it is narrated from 'Abd al-Ḥamīd b. Abī al-Daylam, from Imām al-Ṣādiq, who said: 'When Noah boarded the ship, it was said: "*Away with the wrongdoing lot!*"'

(17) In *Majma' al-Bayān*, about the verse, It was said, *Then it was said, 'O earth, swallow your water ...!'*, al-Ṭabrisī writes: 'It is narrated that the disbelievers of Quraysh wanted to meet the challenge of the the Qur'an, so they refrained from eating grains, the meat of sheep, and drinking wine for forty days, so that their minds would be clear. But just as they began to undertake their task, they heard this verse, and some of them said to each other, "This is speech like no other, and it does not resemble the speech of creatures," so they abandoned their task and dispersed.

Qur'anic, Narrative, Historical, and Philosophical Studies on the Story of Noah

Introduction:

The Qur'an mentions Noah's name on over forty occasions, sometimes referencing parts of his story in general and at others explaining them in detail. However, his story is not fully outlined in any one place in the style of a historical narrative that recounts his lineage, family, birthplace, place of residence, upbringing, occupation, lifespan, death, burial place, and all other personal details. This is because Qur'an was not sent down to serve as a book of history or to chronicle the lives of people, whether good or wicked.

On the contrary, the Qur'an is a book of guidance that explains to people the means by which they can attain happiness and makes plain for them the manifest truth so that they will follow it and achieve success in this life and the Hereafter. Sometimes, it alludes to parts of the stories of the prophets and nations to illustrate how God deals with His servants, and to draw a lesson from the lives of those whom His grace has enveloped and who have been ennobled by His dignity, and to establish a conclusive argument against the rest.

The story of Noah has been detailed in six chapters of the Qur'an: al-Aʿrāf, Hūd, al-Muʾminūn, al-Shuʿarāʾ, al-Qamar, and Nūḥ. The most detailed account is found in Sūrah Hūd, which discusses his story in twenty-five of its verses (11:25–49).

The Story of Noah in the Qur'an, His Mission and Prophethood:

After Adam, humanity lived as a single nation in simplicity and innocence, following the innate human disposition (*fiṭra*) with which they had been endowed. However, arrogance and rebelliousness gradually began to spread among them, leading some to assert dominance over others and turning some of them into rulers of others. This is the original seed that, if nurtured and allowed to flourish, would bear nothing but a religion of idolatry and severe inequality between social classes, characterized by the strong exploiting the weak and the powerful enslaving and demeaning the dispossessed and resulting in disputes and conflicts among the people.

During the time of Noah, corruption had spread across the earth. People turned away from the religion of monotheism and the way of social

justice and, instead, turned towards the worship of idols. God Almighty named some of these idols as Wadd, Suwāʿ, Yaghūth, Yaʿūq, and Nasr (71:23).

Societal classes had diverged significantly by this point, with the wealthy and those with large families trampling the rights of the weak and dispossessed. Tyrants belittled those beneath them and ruled according to their whims (See the accounts in the chapters al-Aʿrāf, Hūd, and Nūḥ).

In response, God sent Noah to humanity with a scripture and a law. He called upon them to recognise the oneness of God, renounce the worship of idols, and establish equality among themselves (2:213) by delivering both comforting promises and solemn warnings to them.

His Religion and Law, Peace be Upon Him:

Noah called upon his people to recognise the oneness of God Almighty and reject any partners (as is evident from all the Qur'anic stories about him), to submit to God (as evident from the chapters Nūḥ and Yūnus, and verse 3:19), to bid people to what is good and forbid them from evil (as illustrated by 11:27), to perform prayers (4:103 and 26:8), to promote equality and justice, to avoid sinful and evil acts, to speak the truth, and to fulfil promises (6:151–152). In addition to this, Noah is the first prophet mentioned in the Qur'an to have initiated the practice of invoking the name of God for important matters (see 11:41).

His Preaching to His People:

Noah tirelessly invited his people to have faith in God and His signs, calling them to the truth day and night, both openly and in private. However, their only response was obstinacy and arrogance. The more fervently he called them, the more entrenched they became in their rebellion and disbelief. Only his family and a small number of others believed in him. Eventually, having lost all hope in of his people ever having faith, he complained about them to his Lord and sought His help (See the chapters Nūḥ, al-Qamar, and al-Mu'minūn).

His Life Among His People:

We are told that Noah remained among his people for *a thousand-less-fifty years* (29:14), calling them towards God. Yet, they responded to him

with only mockery, derision, and accusations of madness. They believed he was trying to gain dominance over them. Eventually, he sought help from his Lord (Sūrah al-ʿAnkabūt). God revealed to him that no one among his people would believe except those who had already done so, and He consoled him in their midst (Sūrah Hūd). Consequently, Noah prayed to God for their destruction and requested that He cleanse the earth from their presence to the very last one (Sūrah Nūḥ). God then revealed to him that he should construct the Ark under His observation and guidance (Sūrah Hūd).

His Construction of the Ark:

God commanded Noah to construct the Ark, supporting and guiding him through the process. As he began construction, groups of his people would pass by, mocking him for building a ship on dry land. Noah responded, *'If you ridicule us, we shall ridicule you just as you ridicule us. Soon you will know whom a disgraceful punishment will overtake and on whom a lasting punishment will descend'* (11:38). God established a sign for the onset of the punishment in the form of water gushing forth from the oven (Sūrah Hūd and al-Mu'minūn).

The Onset of Punishment and the Advent of the Flood:

When the construction of the Ark was complete and the divine decree came, God instructed Noah to take a pair of every living creature and all his family members aboard the ship, with the exception of his treacherous wife and his son who refused to board, as they had been condemned to drown. He was also to bring aboard those who believed (Sūrah Hūd and al-Mu'minūn). Once all were aboard, God opened the heavens with pouring rain and caused the springs of the earth to gush forth, converging the waters from above and below as preordained (Sūrah al-Qamar). The waters rose, lifting the ship as it navigated waves as high as mountains (Sūrah Hūd). The ensuing deluge engulfed the wrongdoers and drowned them all. God had commanded Noah, when he and those with him settled on the Ark, to praise God for delivering him from the wrongdoing people and to invoke His blessings. He said: *'All praise belongs to Allah, who has delivered us from the wrongdoing lot,'* and *'My Lord! Land me with a blessed landing, for You are the best of those who bring ashore'* (23:28–29).

The Conclusion of the Matter and the Disembarkation of Noah and His Companions from the Ark:

After the flood covered the earth and drowned the people (as evidenced in Sūrah al-Sāffāt, 37: 77), God commanded the earth to swallow its water and for the skies to clear. The waters receded, and the Ark rested on Mount Judi. It was proclaimed, "*'Away with the wrongdoing lot!'*(11:44), and God told Noah to disembark with His peace and blessings upon him and the nations who were with him. There would never be another universal flood after this, and God would bless some of the nations with the good things of this worldly life before they were seized by a painful punishment. Thus, Noah and those with him disembarked to worship God in monotheism and submission. His offspring inherited the earth, and God decreed that they would be the successors (Sūrah Hūd, al-Sāffāt).

The Story of Noah's Drowned Son:

When Noah was boarding the Ark with his family and the believers, one of his sons did not join him. This son did not believe his father's warning that those who stayed behind would inevitably drown. Seeing his son keeping apart from him, Noah called out, '*O my son! Board with us, and do not be with the faithless!*' His son replied, *'I shall take refuge on a mountain; it will protect me from the flood.'* Noah said, *'There is none today who can protect from Allah's edict, except someone upon whom He has mercy'*—referring to the occupants of the Ark. However, his son did not heed his words. The waves came between them, and he was among those who drowned (11:42–43).

Now, while Noah knew of his wife's treachery, he had not been aware of his son's hidden disbelief. Had he known, his son's fate would not have grieved him so. He, after all, was the one who prayed, *'My Lord! 'Do not leave on the earth any inhabitant from among the faithless. If You leave them, they will lead astray Your servants and will not beget except vicious ingrates*' (71:26–27). He, who said, *'My Lord! Indeed my people have impugned me. So judge conclusively between me and them, and deliver me and the faithful who are with me'* (26:117–118). Furthermore, he had already heard God's words when it was revealed to him, '*and do not plead with Me for those who are wrongdoers: they shall indeed be drowned*' (11:37). Therefore, had he known the truth of the matter, he would not have grieved as he did.

However, being unaware of his son's faithlessness, Noah found himself gripped by anguish and called out to his Lord, '*My Lord! My son is indeed from my family. Your promise is indeed true, and You are the fairest of all judges.* You are not unjust in Your judgement, and You are not ignorant in Your decree. So, what has happened to my son?' It was only the intervention of divine providence that prevented him from explicitly asking God about his son's salvation—for this was a matter he had no knowledge about—and God revealed to him, *'O Noah! Indeed He is not of your family. Indeed he is unrighteous conduct. So do not ask Me that of which you have no knowledge. I advise you lest you should be among the ignorant'* (11:45–46).

It was at this point that the matter became clear to Noah, and he sought refuge with his Lord saying, , *'My Lord! I seek Your protection lest I should ask You something of which I have no knowledge. If You do not forgive me and have mercy upon me I shall be among the losers'* (11:47).

Who was Noah?

Noah was the first of the Those Endowed with Resolve (*ūlū al-'azm*), who are the foremost of God's prophets. God sent him to all of mankind with a heavenly book and a divine code of law; his book was the first of the heavenly books containing God's laws, and his code was the first divine code of law.

He is also the second patriarch of the present human race. Everyone alive today traces their lineage back to him, and all are his descendants, as God says,

He is the second father of the present human race. To him all lineages trace back, and all are his descendants, as God has said, " *and made his descendants the survivors* (37:77). Noah is also the father of all the prophets mentioned in the Qur'an, except for Adam and Enoch. God has said, *and left for him a good name among posterity* (37:78).

Noah was the first of God's messengers to open the door of divine legislation, to bring a book and a law, to speak to people with rational arguments and to debate with them, in addition to the bringing them divine revelation. He is the origin from which the religion of monotheism in the world sprang forth. Thus, all monotheists until the Day of Judgement owe him a debt of thanks. It is for this reason that God blessed him with a universal peace—something which He has granted to no one else. As said

by the Exalted, " *Peace to Noah, throughout the nations!* (37:79).

God chose Noah above all the worlds (3:33) and counted him among the truly righteous (6:84, 37:80). He also called him a grateful servant (17:3) and included him among His believing servants (37:81). He also referred to him as a righteous servant (66:10).

The last of Noah's prayers that has been recounted to us is his saying: '*My Lord! Forgive me and my parents, and whoever enters my house in faith, and the faithful men and women, and do not increase the wrongdoers in anything except ruin*' (71:28).

The Story of Noah in the Present Torah:[1]

When humans began to multiply on the earth and daughters were born to them that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful. They took for themselves wives of all that they chose, so the Lord said, "My Spirit shall not contend with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years." There were giants on the earth in those days. And also afterward, when the sons of God went in to the daughters of men and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown.

And the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord regretted that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him to His heart. So the Lord said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them." But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.

These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God. And Noah begot three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth.

Then God said to Noah, 'I am determined to make an end of all flesh,

1 The Arabic edition of the Bible quoted by the author here is the Smith & Van Dyke version. The English here is based on the New International Version (NIV), with modifications to better match the language of the Smith & Van Dyke version. The story of Noah is found in Genesis 6–9. (Trans.)

for the earth is filled with violence because of them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make for yourself an ark of gopher wood; you shall make the Ark with compartments, and shall cover it inside and out with pitch. This is how you shall make it: the length of the Ark three hundred cubits, its breadth fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. You shall make a window for the Ark, and finish it to a cubit from the top; and set the door of the Ark in its side. You shall make it with lower, second, and third decks. Behold, I, even I am bringing the flood of water upon the earth, to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life, from under heaven; everything that is on the earth shall perish. But I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall enter the Ark—you and your sons and your wife, and your sons' wives with you. And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every kind into the Ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. Of the birds after their kind, and of the animals after their kind, of every creeping thing of the ground after its kind, two of every kind will come to you to keep them alive. As for you, take for yourself some of all food which is edible, and gather it to yourself; and it shall be for food for you and for them.' Thus Noah did; according to all that God had commanded him, so he did.

Then the Lord said to Noah, 'Enter the Ark, you and all your household, for you alone I have seen to be righteous before me in this time. Of every clean animal you shall take with you seven pairs, a male and his female; and of the animals that are not clean two, a male and his female; also of the birds of the sky, by sevens, male and female, to keep offspring alive on the face of all the earth. For after seven more days, I will send rain on the earth forty days and forty nights; and I will blot out from the face of the land every living thing that I have made.' Noah did according to all that the Lord had commanded him.

And Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of water came upon the earth. Then Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him entered the Ark because of the water of the flood. Of clean animals and animals that are not clean and birds and everything that creeps on the ground, two and two, male and female, went into the Ark with Noah, as God had commanded Noah.

After seven days, the waters of the flood came upon the earth. In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth

day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened. Rain fell on the earth for forty days and forty nights. On the very same day Noah and his sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons entered the Ark. They and every beast according to its kind, and all the livestock according to their kinds, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, according to its kind, and every bird, according to its kind, every winged creature. They went into the Ark with Noah, two and two of all flesh in which there was the breath of life. And those that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him. And the Lord shut him in.

The flood continued for forty days on the earth. The waters increased and lifted up the Ark, and it rose high above the earth. The waters prevailed and increased greatly on the earth, and the Ark floated on the face of the waters. The waters prevailed so mightily on the earth that all the high mountains under the entire heavens were covered. The waters prevailed above the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits deep. And all flesh died that moved on the earth, birds, livestock, beasts, all swarming creatures that swarm on the earth, and all mankind. Everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died. God blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens. They were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those who were with him in the Ark. The waters prevailed on the earth for one hundred and fifty days.

Then God remembered Noah, and all the beasts and all the livestock that were with him in the Ark. And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided. The fountains of the deep and the windows of the heavens were closed, the rain from the heavens was restrained, and the waters receded from the earth continually. At the end of one hundred and fifty days the waters had abated, and in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the Ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. The waters continued to abate until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains were seen.

After forty days, Noah opened the window he had made in the Ark and sent out a raven. It went back and forth until the waters had dried up from the earth. Then he sent out a dove to see if the waters had subsided

from the face of the ground. The dove could not find a resting place for her foot, and returned to him to the Ark, for the waters were still on the face of the whole earth. He put out his hand and took her and brought her into the Ark with him. He waited another seven days, and again he sent out the dove from the Ark. And the dove came back to him in the evening, and there in her mouth was a freshly plucked olive leaf. So Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth. Then he waited another seven days and sent out the dove, and she did not return to him again.

In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried from off the earth. Noah removed the covering of the Ark and looked, and behold, the face of the ground was dry. In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth had dried out.

Then God said to Noah, 'Go out from the Ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons' wives with you. Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh—birds, animals, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth—that they may swarm on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth.' So Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him. Every beast, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth, went out by families from the Ark.

Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And when the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma, the Lord said in his heart, 'I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.'

God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea. Into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man.

From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image. Be fruitful and multiply, increase abundantly on the earth and multiply in it.'

God spoke to Noah and his sons with him, saying, 'Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, from all that go out of the Ark to every beast of the earth. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.' And God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.'

God said to Noah, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.'

The sons of Noah who went forth from the Ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Ham was the father of Canaan. These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the people of the whole earth were dispersed. Noah began to be a man of the soil, and he planted a vineyard. He drank of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent. Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers outside. Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned backward, and they did not see their father's nakedness.

When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, he said, 'Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers.' He also said, 'Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem; and let Canaan be his servant. May God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem, and let Canaan be his servant.' After the flood Noah lived 350 years. All the days of Noah were 950 years, and then he died.

A Discussion of the Biblical Account:

As you can observe, this narrative contradicts the Qur'an from a number of aspects:

Firstly, it does not mention the exception of Noah's wife; instead, it explicitly states that she boarded the ark and was saved with her husband. Some have sought to rationalise this apparent incongruity by suggesting that Noah may have had two wives—one who drowned, and one who survived.

Secondly, it omits the account of Noah's son who drowned, which is narrated in the Qur'an.

Thirdly, it does not mention any believers other than Noah and his family, restricting the account to him, his sons, his wife, and the wives of his sons.

Fourthly, it cites Noah's total lifespan as nine hundred and fifty years, while the Qur'an indicates that this was merely the period he spent preaching among his people, inviting them to God before the flood. As God says, " *Certainly We sent Noah to his people, and he remained with them for a thousand-less-fifty years. Then the flood overtook them while they were wrongdoers.* (29:14)

Fifthly, it mentions the appearance of a rainbow, describes Noah sending out a raven and a dove to investigate, and includes details such as the ark's dimensions—its length, width, height, its three levels—the flood's duration, the water's elevation, and other specifics which are not mentioned in the Qur'an. Some of these details seem far-fetched and unlikely, such as the divine covenant symbolized by the rainbow. Many of these elements have found their way into Islamic accounts of Noah's story through narrations transmitted by the Companions and Successors, and the majority of these appear to borrowings from Jewish and Christian sources (*Isrā'īliyyāt*).

Accounts of the Flood in Different World Cultures:

The author of *Tafsīr al-Manār* highlights that accounts of the Flood have appeared in the annals of various ancient civilizations and nations. Some of these accounts broadly align in their details with the narrative found in Genesis, while others differ from it significantly

The narrative closest to this is that of the Chaldeans, who experienced

the flood in their own land. It is narrated by the Babylonian chronicler Berossus and the Roman-Jewish historian Josephus that the Sumerian king Xisuthrus dreamt, following his father Otiartes' death, that water would overwhelm and drown all of humanity. He was instructed to build an ark in which he, his family, and especially his friends could seek refuge, which he did. This aligns with the Genesis narrative, wherein there was a generation of giants on earth, who were corrupt and filled the world with wickedness, for which God punished them with a flood.

An English Assyriologist, George Smith (d. 1876) discovered clay tablets inscribed with this narrative in cuneiform from the reign of the Neo-Assyrian king Ashurbanipal, around six hundred and sixty years before the birth of Christ. These were transcriptions from an older script dating back to the seventeenth century B.C. or earlier, which would make them older than the Book of Genesis.

The Greeks have a flood narrative that Plato recounts in *Timaeus*: the Egyptian priests told Solon, the Greek philosopher, that the heavens had sent a flood that altered the earth's surface, destroying humanity multiple times through various means. Nothing remained of the previous generation's landmarks or knowledge for subsequent generations.

The Egyptian priest Manetho narrates a flood account that occurred after the first Hermes, who came after Menes I. This account predates the Torah. Ancient Greeks also told the story of a global flood, from which only Deucalion and his wife Pyrrha survived.

Ancient Persians narrated a flood narrative, in which God drowned the earth due to the rampant corruption and evils spread by Ahriman, the god of darkness and evil. They claim the flood began as waters surged from the oven of an old woman while she was baking her bread. However, the Zoroastrians did not believe that this flood covered the entirety of the earth, asserting it was confined to the region of Iraq and ended at the borders of Kurdistan.

Similarly, ancient Indian legends affirm the occurrence of the flood seven times, in a mythic form. The last of these accounts tells of their king and his wife surviving in a great ship, which their god had commanded them to build. The ship was launched and filled with pitch until it came to rest on the Himalayas. But, like the Zoroastrians, the Brahmans deny a global flood, instead saying that it merely drowned all of India. Flood

accounts have can also be found from Japan, China, Brazil, Mexico, and other places. All these narratives concur that the cause of such a cataclysm was God's punishment for human oppression and wickedness.

In the Zoroastrian holy book, the Avesta, it is recorded that Ahura Mazda revealed to Yima (whom the Zoroastrians believe to be the ancient Persian king Jamshid) that a flood would engulf the earth. He was commanded to construct a high wall to protect those inside from drowning. He was to gather within it a group of men and women suitable for procreation, introduce two of every kind of animal species, and build houses and domes in various layers for the assembled people to live in and provide refuge for the animals and birds. He was also instructed to plant fruit trees and cultivate crops to sustain human life and allow them to repopulate the world after the waters had subsided.

In ancient Indian legends[1] there is a flood story in which Manu (whom they believed to be the son of God) was washing his hands when a fish appeared. Manu was amazed when the fish spoke, asking to be saved from destruction, and promising in return to save Manu from a great danger in the future. The fish foretold that a great flood would come and sweep away all creatures. Consequently, Manu kept the fish safe in a jar.

When the fish grew, it informed Manu about the year the flood would occur and instructed him to build a large ship, which he should board to remain safe during the deluge. The fish promised to save him from the flood. Manu constructed the ship, and as the fish grew larger than the jar could accommodate, he released it into the sea.

The flood occurred as the fish had predicted. When Manu entered the ship, the fish swam towards him, and he fastened the ship to a horn on its head. It pulled him towards the northern mountains, where Manu tied the ship to a tree. As the water receded and dried up, Manu remained alone.

Was Noah's prophethood universal for all humankind?

The question of whether Noah was a prophet for all humankind is a matter on which scholars have differing views. Among the Shīʿa, it is commonly believed that his message was universal and intended for all humankind. This view is supported by traditions narrated from the Household of

1 According to the *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Najjār. (Auth.)

the Prophet that suggest that Those Endowed with Resolve (*ūlū al-ʿazm*)—including Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad—were sent to all humanity.

As for the Sunnī school of thought, some scholars assert that Noah's message was universal, relying on the apparent meaning of verses that speak of the flood affecting all the inhabitants of the earth. Such verses include God's statement: '*Do not leave on the earth any inhabitant from among the faithless*' (71:26), His saying, '*There is none today who can protect from Allah's edict, except someone upon whom He has mercy.*' (11:43), and His statement: *and made his descendants the survivors* (37: 77). This view also draws on a tradition from sources they deem authentic that Noah was the first Messenger sent by God to the people of the earth, suggesting his mission was to all of them.

However, other Sunnī scholars reject this based on a tradition in the *Saḥīḥ* from the Prophet: 'Each Prophet was sent specifically to his people - and I was sent to all of mankind.' These scholars say that the aforementioned verses should be interpreted with this in mind. It is plausible, they argue, that 'the earth' mentioned in the verses refers only to the land inhabited by Noah's people, their homeland, as when Pharaoh said to Moses and Aaron, '*...so that supremacy may be yours in the land* (al-ard)*?*' (10:78).

This could render the meaning of the first verse: 'Leave not one disbeliever of my people on this earth.' The second could mean: 'None can protect my people from God's edict today,' and the third could mean: 'And We made his descendants the survivors of his people.'

However, the reality is that this topic has not been fully explored in their discussions. What must, at the very least, be stated is that prophethood emerged in human society in response to a genuine need for it and a real bond between people and their Lord. It is based on a cosmic reality rather than being an arbitrary matter of convention. One of the real principle operating within the cosmic order is that all species must move towards perfection and be guided towards their existential goals. God says, *...who created and proportioned, who determined and guided* (87:3-4), and also, ... *who gave everything its creation and then guided it* (20:50).

In other words, every kind of being, from the moment of its inception, is directed towards the perfection of its existence and the goal of its creation, wherein lies its ultimate good and happiness. The human species is

no exception to this principle; its individuals and communities are directed towards their perfection and happiness. Moreover, it is crucial to note that such perfection cannot be achieved by the human being alone, given his numerous vital needs and the myriad tasks that must be performed to meet them. The practical intellect, which drives him to benefit from everything possible and utilise inanimate objects, plants, and animals for his own benefit, also encourages him to benefit from the works of other members of his own species by cooperating with them.

And yet, individuals are all alike, each possessing the same practical intellect and unique human sensibilities as the other. These spur them to cooperate with one another: Everyone works for the collective good and profits from the works of others to the extent that they contribute their own efforts. God says, *It is We who have dispensed among them their livelihood in the present life, and raised some of them above others in rank, so that some may take others into service* (43:32).

This is what we mean when we say that human beings are fundamentally built for collaborative association. The necessities of life and our social dynamics compel us to function as cooperative beings. Despite this, human nature's primary instinct is to maximise the benefit they derive from anything that presents them with an opportunity to do so, even if this the efforts of other people. Thus, regardless of how strong or self-sufficient a person may become, if they start to exploit others without compensation, this only confirms God's words: *Indeed man is most unfair and ungrateful!* (14:34) and *Indeed man becomes rebellious when he considers himself without need. Indeed to your Lord is the return* (96: 8).

Moreover, it is essential to realize that collaborative associations among individual human beings can only arise through the establishment of laws to govern these associations and guardians to enforce them. This is demonstrated by the continuous historical trajectory of human societies. Regardless of how complete or deficient, sophisticated or primitive a society may be, there exist customs and norms wholly or mostly observed. History, experience, and observation all attest to this simple fact. These customs, norms, or, if you prefer, laws, are mental concepts that are applied either entirely or mostly in society, resulting in happiness either in reality or at least in perception. These laws are elements that are integral to the human pursuit of perfection, and they provide a course for humans

to follow in their transition from a primal state to a complete form living in society. They guide humans towards the ultimate purpose of their existence.

We understand it to be a matter of divine necessity for God to guide humans towards the fulfilment of their life's purpose and the perfection of their existence, just as He guides all other species towards these goals. As such, He has guided them through their own nature and instinct to seek their wellbeing and happiness; through the order of the universe and the faculties with which He has furnished them and which allow them to distinguish benefit from harm, good from evil, and happiness from misery. As God says, *by the soul and Him who fashioned it,and inspired it with its virtues and vices: one who purifies it is felicitous, and one who betrays it fails* (91:7–10).

God guides humanity, through His necessary care (*'ināya*), towards the foundational and practical principles of belief and action. The application of these principles completes and fulfils the human's life purpose. God's divine care for the perfection of all species, in accordance with their unique nature, necessitates this kind of guidance, as does it the guidance towards purely physical flourishing also.

However, the intellect with which the human being has been equipped, as useful as it may be, is not by itself sufficient in this respect. As we have already discussed, the intellect incites us to make use of things for our benefit and to discern one thing from another. Now, it is impossible for one faculty to perform two opposing actions or to yield two contradictory results. Nevertheless, those individuals who disregard society's laws and commit crimes against others are still rational beings, who benefit from the faculties of reason.

Thus, it becomes clear that there must be another path for teaching humanity the truth of the divine law and showing them the path of perfection and happiness in addition to that of thinking and intellect: This is the path of revelation. This divine form of communication conveys to humans what will lead them to success by acting on it and believing in it, both in this worldly life and in the Hereafter.

Now, one might argue that revelation makes no difference, for the law of the prophets does not provide anything more than what reason can: humanity will refuse to submit to the laws of the prophets as surely as it

has refused to submit to the laws of the intellect. Therefore, if revelation cannot direct human society or guide it to the path of truth, what use is it?

To this, I would respond by saying that this discussion has two dimensions. The first is that it is a divine necessity to guide human society through teachings that would cause people to flourish and be fulfilled if they are followed—this is the guidance of revelation, and reason by itself is not enough here. The second dimension is the question of what the external reality and actual situation is. Our focus in this discussion is on the first dimension, and the fact that this prophethood has scarcely led people towards its intended purpose does not in any way diminish our argument. This is akin to how God's care guides plant and animal species towards the perfection of their creation and the purpose of their existence. Yet, most individuals of each species fall short of reaching their species-specific purpose and perish before attaining their natural lifespan.

In summary, the path of prophethood and revelation is indispensable for the cultivation and nurturing of mankind when considering God's care for His creatures. Without revelation, God's argument over mankind would not be complete based solely on reason, for it has a role beyond this scope, namely calling humans towards what is in their own best interest. Even if it calls them towards something beneficial for the species, it does so because of its relevance to their individual wellbeing. Understand this, and consider carefully God's words: *We have indeed revealed to you as We revealed to Noah and the prophets after him, and (as) We revealed to Abraham and Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, Jesus and Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon,—and We gave David the Psalms—and messengers We have recounted to you earlier and messengers We have not recounted to you,—and to Moses Allah spoke directly—messengers, as bearers of good news and warners, so that mankind may not have any argument against Allah, after the (sending of the) messengers; and Allah is all-mighty, all-wise* (4:163–165).

Therefore, it is a necessary and logical corollary of God's care and concern for His creatures that He reveals a religion for human society to follow and a code of laws for them to observe in their social lives, without focusing only some groups and leaving others aside without care. The necessary implication of this is that the first code of law revealed to humankind—meaning the laws brought by Noah—must be a universal law.

God has informed us of this universal principle in His saying, '*Mankind were a single community; then Allah sent the prophets as bearers of good news and as warners, and He sent down with them the Book with the truth, that it may judge between the people concerning that about which they differed* (2:213). This indicates that people were initially and naturally a single body, showing no signs of conflicts or disputes. Then, when differences emerged among them, God sent prophets with a code of laws and a scripture with which to judge truthfully in those matters they differed in, and to settle the subjects of contention and dispute that existed between them.

As for the special favor that God showed to the Prophet Muḥammad, He says in the Qur'an, *He has prescribed for you the religion which He had enjoined upon Noah and which We have revealed to you, and which We had enjoined upon Abraham, Moses and Jesus* (42:13). The context of this verse suggests that the divine laws revealed to all of humanity are those mentioned and no others. The first law mentioned is that of Noah. Had it not been universal for all humans, especially in his time, there would have been another prophet with another law for those other than Noah's people, and such a prophet has not been mentioned in this verse or in any other place in the Qur'an. And if Noah's law was not universal and no such prophet was sent, then this would have meant that God had neglected the rest of humankind who were not part of Noah's people, both at his time and thereafter.

Therefore, it is clear that Noah's mission as a prophet was universal, and he was given a book that contained a code of laws that was intended to eliminate disagreements. His book was the first of the heavenly scriptures containing the divine law. The part of the aforementioned verse which says, *and He sent down with them the Book with the truth, that it may judge between the people concerning that about which they differed*, refers to his book, or to his book alongside the books of other Resolute Prophets: Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad.

It also appears that any indication found in the traditions that his call was not universal contradicts the explicit meaning of the Qur'an. For example, in a tradition from Imām al-Riḍā, we read: 'Those Endowed with Resolve are five in number. Each of them had a code of laws and a book, and their prophetic mission was universal for everyone besides them, whether these were prophets or not.' We have already discussed

this tradition in our commentary on the verse, *Mankind were a single community* (2:213).

Did the flood cover the entirety of the earth?

The answer to this question was clarified in the previous chapter. The universality of Noah's prophetic mission necessitates the universality of the divine punishment. This is indeed an excellent indication that all the verses that appear to indicate the global nature of the Flood do in fact point to this. For example, when God recounts statements from Noah such as, '*Do not leave on the earth any inhabitant from among the faithless*' (71:26), His saying, '*There is none today who can protect from Allah's edict, except someone upon whom He has mercy.*' (11:43), and God's own statement: *and made his descendants the survivors* (37: 77).

Further evidence for the Flood being worldwide can be found in two places in the Qur'an. First, when God commanded Noah to load two of every species of animal into the Ark, when it is clear that if the Flood was a localized event—for example, to Iraq, as has been suggested—there would have been no need to carry two of every single species in the Ark—as should be obvious.

In spite of this, some scholars have argued that the flood was localized to the land of Noah's people. For example, Rāshid Riḍā, the author of the commentary *al-Manār*, argues exactly this. For instance, after discussing the salvation of Noah and his family, speaks about the verse, *and made his descendants the survivors* (37: 77). He says that while the phrase '*the survivors*' (*al-bāqīn*) might imply the meaning of '*the* only *survivors*', this could mean '*the* only *survivors* of his people.' As for when Noah said, '*Do not leave on the earth any inhabitant from among the faithless*', Rāshid Riḍā says that '*the earth*' (*al-arḍ*) here need not refer to the entirety of the globe, as it is often the case in the stories of various prophets and nations that the term *al-arḍ* is used to denote their land or homeland. For example, God recounts Pharaoh telling Moses and Aaron: '*... so that supremacy may be yours in the land* (al-arḍ)*?*' (10:78) Here, Pharaoh uses *al-arḍ* to refer to the land of Egypt. Equally, consider the verse addressed to the Prophet, *They were about to hound you out of the land* (al-arḍ)*, to expel you from it* (17:76), where *al-arḍ* refers to the land of Mecca. Then there is the verse, *We decreed to the Children of Israel in the Book: 'Twice*

you will cause corruption in the land (al-arḍ)*, and you will perpetrate great tyranny'* (17:4), where the meaning of *al-arḍ* is their homeland. According to him, there are many examples of this.

Moreover, he argues that the apparent meaning of the verses, combined with contextual evidence and the accounts received from the People of the Book, indicate that during Noah's time, his people were the only ones alive on Earth. All of them were wiped out by the Flood, and only his descendants remained afterwards. This suggests that the Flood must have occurred in the area of the earth in which they lived, covering its plains and mountains, but not the entire planet. Unless of course the dry land at that time was minimal due to its relatively recent formation and the even more recent emergence of humans on it. Indeed, scholars of formation and geological strata suggest that when Earth separated from the Sun, it was a fiery, inflamed sphere. It then became a watery sphere, and dry land gradually emerged on it over millions of years.

Next, he highlights the evidence presented by some thinkers that the Flood covered the entire Earth. They claimed that the presence of certain seashells and fossilized fish at the tops of mountains, which can only form in the sea, indicates that water once reached these heights. This could only have occurred if the water had indeed covered the Earth.

However, he rejects this argument because the presence of seashells and marine animals at the tops of mountains does not necessarily indicate that this was due to that Flood. Instead, it is more likely that this was a result of the formation of mountains and other dry land in water, as previously mentioned. After all, a few days would not provide sufficient time for the waters to reach such heights.

Finally, Rashīd Riḍā argues to the effect that these historical issues are not the primary objectives of the Qur'an. Therefore, they were not clarified with any definitive verses. As a result, he maintains what he has previously stated as an apparent explanation of the texts, but he does not adopt it as a definitive religious belief. He goes on to say that if geological science proves otherwise, it would not affect his religious beliefs, because such scientific findings do not contradict any explicit text in his belief system.

Author's comment: In response to the views of Rashīd Riḍā: His interpretation of these verses is an arbitrary restriction of the meaning of the text, without any evidence to support it. Likewise, his rejection of

seashells and fish being found on mountain tops as evidence for a global flood—because a few days would not have given sufficient time for the waters to rise so high—is vulnerable to counter-arguments, because it is entirely possible that these remains were carried to such heights by the waves of the Flood and remained there after the water receded. It is also not necessarily impossible for a Flood to submerge towering mountains within a few days.

In addition to this, Rashīd Riḍā has ignored what the verses do make explicit, namely that Noah was ordered to take two of each kind of animal species. This is virtually a clear declaration that the Flood would cover all, or most, of the Earth's dry lands, the majority being tantamount to all.

The truth is that the apparent meaning of the Qur'an—a meaning that is, in fact, undeniable—is that the Flood was global and that all human beings on Earth were drowned save for those aboard the Ark with Noah. No definitive argument has yet arisen that could divert the text from this apparent meaning.

I asked my esteemed friend, Dr. Sahabi[1], a professor of geology at Tehran University, to enlighten me about on what light geological research can shed on this global Flood and whether there is any comprehensive evidence supporting it. He responded by forwarding an article, a summary of which is detailed in the following sections:

1. Sedimentary Lands: In geology, 'sedimentary lands' refers to the Earth's layers formed by deposits of running water on the Earth's surface, such as plains and channels which are covered by sand and gravel particles.

We can recognise sedimentary lands by the accumulation of smooth rounded sand and gravel particles. These were originally sharp-edged, angular pieces of stone that were gradually smoothed by the friction caused by them colliding together in running water and great floods. The water then carried them and spread them on the Earth, depositing them in both nearby or distant locations.

Sedimentary lands are not limited to plains. Most terrains of this type are mixed with or formed of extremely fine sand. Because of its fineness and lightness, this sand was transported to far off locations by the flow of

1 Yadollah Sahabi (1905–2002). (Trans.)

water and floods.

Sedimentary lands are covered by several layers of sand and soil, some stacked atop others without any order or system. This indicates, firstly, that these layers were not formed at the same time and, secondly, that the flow of water and floods, or their intensity, changed over different periods.

This suggests that the sedimentary lands were once channels and pathways for significant amounts of water and large floods, even though they might appear far removed from such things today.

These lands, which tell the story of extensive water flow and enormous floods, are found in most areas of the earth, including most of the regions of Iran, such as Tehran, Qazvin, Semnan, Sabzevar, Yazd, Tabriz, Kerman, Shiraz, and others. They are also found in Mesopotamia, particularly its southern regions, Transoxiana, the Syrian desert, India, southern France, eastern China, Egypt, and most parts of America. The thickness of the sedimentary layer in some places reaches hundreds of metres. In Tehran, it exceeds four hundred metres.

From what has been mentioned, it can be deduced firstly, that the earth's surface was not too long ago (as will be discussed further) regularly experienced enormous floods that may have covered most or all of its plains.

Secondly, considering the thickness of the sedimentary crust in some places, the flood did not occur once or within a single year or a few years. Instead, it lasted or repeated over hundreds of years. Each time it occurred, it formed a sedimentary layer, then, if it stopped, a layer of soil covered it. If it recurred, it formed another layer, and so forth. The variations in the sedimentary layers, in terms of the precision of their sand grains and lack thereof, suggest differences in the intensity and weakness of the floods.

2. Sedimentary layers are the youngest geological crusts and strata: Sedimentary layers usually settle horizontally. However, their accumulated parts might have been subject to intense pressures from above and below. As a result, they gradually shift from a straight horizontal orientation and become curved or twisting. This effect is not apparent over short periods but becomes more noticeable over the course of millions of years. As a result, mountains and their twisting ranges are formed, with some of their hills overlapping each other and their peaks rising above sea levels.

From this, we can infer that the surviving horizontal sedimentary layers

and crusts are among the most recent strata to be formed on the earth's surface. The available technical evidence suggests that they were not formed more than ten to fifteen thousand years before our present time.[1]

3. The expansion of the seas: It appears that the new sedimentary crusts have played a role in the expansion of most of the world's seas. Their waters rose and covered most of their coasts, forming islands surrounded by the sea on most sides.

For example, it was during this time that the British Isles became entirely separated from France and the rest of Europe. Europe became separated from Africa on its southern side and Africa from Europe on its northern side, where the two had previously been connected by land, due to the expansion of the Mediterranean Sea. As a result, the Italian and Tunisian peninsulas were formed, along with the islands of Sicily, Sardinia, and others. The Indonesian islands from Java and Sumatra side to southern Japan, which had been connected to Asia from the south-east until now, became separated and assumed their current form. Similarly, the separation of North America from Northern Europe is one of the remaining effects of this period – the era of the Flood.

The internal movements and transformations of the earth have had effects on the flow of these waters and how they have settled in the depressions on the earth's surface. This is why the water receded from some submerged coastal areas when the Flood dominated most of the surface, forming lakes and expanding seas. An example of this is the southern coast of Khuzestan, from which the waters of the Persian Gulf receded.[2]

4. Factors influencing the increase of water during the era of the Flood: The geological evidence to which we have referred supports the fact that the atmospheric precipitations were unusual in the early stages of the current human life cycle—that is, during the era of the Flood. In fact, the

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1 This excludes some of what is on the edges of the Baltic and other northern regions, which have horizontal sedimentary layers remaining in their state from the oldest geological epochs.

2 The city of Shush and the palace of Karkheh in Iran were on the coast during the time of the Achaemenid kings, and sailing ships in the Persian Gulf would dock in front of the palace.

Flood appears to have occurred due to major and extraordinary climatic changes. The air was warmer in this cycle to what it was previously, which was characterized by intense cold that covered most of the northern half of the globe with snow, frost, and ice. It is highly likely that the frost accumulated from the previous climatic cycle was still present and had not yet melted in the valleys of most of the northern temperate region.

The heat acting on the Earth's surface in two successive cycles, along with the accumulation of frost and ice, resulted in a drastic change in the atmosphere and a massive inversion, influencing the rise of water vapor into the atmosphere and its accumulation therein. This was followed by intense precipitation and unusually heavy rainfall.

These incessant and heavy rains, which fell on elevations and in valleys, especially on the newly-formed mountain ranges in southern and western Asia, southern Europe, and northern Africa—such as the Alborz, Himalayas, and Alps—and in the west of America, was followed by the flow of enormous, tremendous floods over them.[1] These floods carved the rocks, excavated the earth, uprooted stones, and carried them to the lands and sloping valleys, creating new valleys, deepening old ones, and expanding them. They then spread the stones, pebbles, and sand they carried, forming new sedimentary layers.

What contributed to the intensity of the Flood and added to the intensity of its waters was that the excavation of new valleys revealed additional subterranean water reserves, which are the sources of wells and running springs. The flood removed the layers that had obstructed their flow, causing the springs to erupt and add their own waters to the floodwaters, increasing their destructive power and assisting them in flooding the earth's plains and mountains and inundating them.

However, the earth's water reserves are finite. They were eventually depleted, and with this and the ceasing of the rain from the sky, the Flood came to an end. The waters receded into to the seas, low-lying lands, and some of them were absorbed into some of the empty spaces and pockets within the Earth, which the floods had emptied.

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1 These mountains are younger than the rest of the Earth's mountains and have not existed for more than two million years. Thus, they were the freshest and slightly taller than the others due to the lack of exposure to sculpting factors such as rain and wind. (Trans.)

5. Conclusion of the Study: We can correlate much of this scientific research to what God has said about the specific characteristics of the Flood that occurred in Noah's time, such as His saying: *Then We opened the gates of the sky with pouring waters, and We made the earth burst forth with springs, and the waters met for a preordained purpose* (54:12); and His saying, *When Our edict came and the oven gushed ...* (11:40); and His saying, *Then it was said, 'O earth, swallow your water! O sky, leave off!' The waters receded; the edict was carried out ...* (11:44).

In line with this study, some newspapers[1] in Tehran recently published a report summarized as follows: A group of scientists from America, guided by the Turkish military, on a mountain peak some 1,400 feet high in Mount Ararat in eastern Turkey, discovered pieces of wood whose measurements suggest were the remnants of an ancient ship that ended up there. Some of these pieces date back to approximately 2,500 B.C. Their measurements suggest that these are parts of a ship that was roughly two-thirds the size of the English ship "Queen Mary", which is 1,019 feet long and 118 feet wide. The wood was transported to San Francisco for further investigation: could these pieces be linked to what scholars believe to be Noah's Ark?

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Noah's exceptionally long life

The Qur'an indicates that Noah lived a long life and that he invited his people to worship God for a thousand years minus fifty. Some researchers have dismissed this due to human lifespan generally not exceeding one hundred or one hundred and twenty years. Some even suggested that the ancients considered each month a year, so nine hundred and fifty years equates to eighty years minus ten months. However, this interpretation is highly improbable.

Some have argued that Noah's long life was a divine grace granted to him as a miracle. For example, al-Thaʿlabī in his *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* described Noah thus: 'He was the longest-lived of all the prophets, and was called the most senior of the prophets (*akbar al-anbiyā'*) and the elder of the messengers (*shaykh al-mursalīn*). His miracle was himself, for he lived a thousand years without his age diminishing, and his strength did not decrease.'

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1 The Kayhān newspaper published on the first of September, 1962, corresponding to the first of Rabi' al-Awwal, 1382 Hijri. (Ed.)

The truth is that there is no evidence yet to deny that a human being can live such long lives. Rather, it is more likely that early humans lived much longer than the current average lifespan due to their enjoying simpler lifestyles, with fewer worries, and encountering fewer of the diseases that we face today, and the absence of other factors detrimental to human life. Whenever we find a person who lived one hundred and twenty to one hundred and sixty years, we find that they led a simple life with few worries and a simple understanding of the world. Therefore, it is not far-fetched that some people in the past lived for hundreds of years.

However, questioning God's word about something like the age of Noah, which is among the miraculous signs that defy the ordinary, is rather strange. We have already discussed the nature and scope of miracles earlier in our commentary.

Where is Mount Judi?

Some have said that it is in Diyarbakr, near Mosul, in mountains connected to the Armenian Mountains. It is named Ararat in the Torah. *Al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ* states: 'Judi is a mountain in Northern Mesopotamia where Noah's Ark came to a rest. In the Torah, it is called "Ararat".' In *Marāṣid al-Iṭṭilā'*, we read: 'Judi, a tall mountain that overlooks Jazīrat Ibn 'Umar to the east of the Tigris in the vicinity of Mosul, where Noah's Ark came to a rest when the waters of the Flood subsided.'

The reason for the Flood

Some might object that God drowned Noah's people due to their sinfulness, but that the rest of the animals on Earth were blameless, so why did they have to perish due in the floodwaters? This objection is baseless as not all destruction, even if widespread, is a necessarily punishment or revenge. Disasters that kill thousands, such as earthquakes, floods, pandemics, and plagues, occur frequently throughout history, but there is still wisdom in God's decree.

On Idol Worship

Human beings and their reliance on sense perception

A human being, in their social life, acts on the basis of the law of cause and effect and other universal laws that they have derived from observing

the cosmic order. In this, they differ from the behavior of other animals, because they engage in reflection and deduction—by which I mean logical reasoning—in order to achieve long-term goals.

And yet, human beings cannot feel confidence in their examination and inquiry without forming a verdict regarding the cause of this observable world, of which they are a part, whether affirmatively or negatively. This is because they realize that their life's happiness, which they desire above anything else, fundamentally differs based on whether they affirm or deny the existence of this agent known as God. It is obvious that there can be no comparison between the life of a human being who affirms the existence of a living, knowledgeable, and capable Creator for the world, who inevitably submits to His greatness and majesty and lives his life according to what He loves and approves of, and the life of a human being who views the world as aimless, without a beginning or an end, and where human life is but a limited existence that perishes with death and is nullified by passing, and humanity has no higher purpose in it except what animals have in terms of lust, anger, and the desire for food and sex.

Therefore, there is an innate intellectual tendency in humans to ask the question: Is there a God? This is followed by a second tendency, which is the innate tendency to affirm and decide that there is a God who created everything in existence with His power and set the cosmic order in motion with His Lordship, guiding everything towards its goal and perfecting its existence in accordance with His will, and that everything that exists will ultimately return to its Lord just as it originated from Him.

Moreover, a human's constant engagement with perception and what is perceptible throughout their life, their immersion in materiality, and their attachment to the earth all lead them to represent everything they understand and imagine in a tangible perceptible form, even if it something completely inaccessible to perception and imagination, such as universal principles and abstract truths that are detached from matter. However, humans gain an understanding of objects of intellect through their faculties of sense and imagination—two faculties on which they rely extensively in their thought.

This inherent human tendency means that one often imagines gives their God an imaginary form based on what they are familiar with from tangible, physical matters. Even most monotheists, who believe in the utter

transcendence and sanctity of the Lord of the Worlds above the limits of physicality and its conditions, establish in their minds a vague, imaginary image of Him that is separate from the world. This image comes to mind when they turn to Him regarding a matter or speak about Him. However, religious education rectifies this by establishing a balance between negation and affirmation and by drawing a distinction between anthropomorphism and transcendence. The monotheistic Muslim says: 'He is something unlike anything else, He has power unlike the power of His creation, and knowledge unlike any other knowledge'—and so on, in this fashion.

Rarely does it happen that a human turns towards the realm of divinity and majesty, with their self being free from this anthropomorphic tendency. It is even more unusual for there to be a person who has devoted himself utterly to God, with his heart unattached to anything other than Him, and who is untouched by satanic anthropomorphisms. God has said: *Clear is Allah of whatever they allege, except Allah's exclusive servants* (37:160). He has also related that Iblis said: *'By Your might, I will surely pervert them, except Your exclusive servants among them'* (38:83).

In summary, humans are strongly inclined to imagine non-perceptible matters in the form of perceptible things. So, when they hear that there is something beyond physical nature that is stronger, more capable, greater, and higher than nature, and that it is active in it, which encompasses it, predates it, manages it, and rules it, such that nothing comes into being but by its command, and nothing changes from one state to another except by its will and decision, they can only initially comprehend this by analogy to their understanding of physical attributes.

Often, they imagine it in their minds as a human figure above the heavens, seated on a majestic throne, governing the affairs of the world through his contemplation, directing them by his will and issuing commands and prohibitions. The existing Torah explicitly states that God is so, and that He created humans in His image, and the Gospels also appear to indicate this as well.

It so happens that it is a feature of human nature, especially in primitive early humans, is to create an image for their God, who is free from similarity and comparison, that resembles physical beings and matches the descriptions and attributes they ascribe to Him, just as they represent the Trinity as a human with three faces, as if each of the general attributes is a

face of the Lord turning towards His creation with it.

Turning towards the worship of God:

When a person determines that the cosmos has a deity who created it through His knowledge and power, it is inevitable that he will submit to Him through the humility of worship, in accordance with the universal law of the cosmos. This law is the submission of the weak to the strong, the obedience of the powerless to the powerful, and the surrender of the lesser to the greater. This is a general law that governs all aspects of existence and affects causes and their effects.

When this law becomes evident to beings endowed with senses and will, such as animals, it sets a precedent for submission and obedience of the weak to the strong. This can be observed in the behavior of animals when the weaker ones recognise the superiority of the stronger ones and give up any resistance or opposition to them.

This law becomes manifest in the human world in a way that is broader and more apparent than in any other creature due to the depth of the human being's cognition and his capacity for rational thought. In fact, it can be observed in most of our goals and actions, where we rely on it to seek benefit or avoid harm. Examples of this include subjects submitting to their ruler, the poor to the rich, the subordinate to the leader, the commanded to the commander, the servant to the served, the student to the teacher, the lover to the beloved, the needy to the affluent, the slave to the master, and the creature to the Creator.

All of these relationships of submission are, in fact, one and the same. They represent psychological humility and abasement before something that is perceived to be greater and more dominant. The physical act that embodies and exemplifies this humility is worship, no matter to whom or by whom it is performed. There is no distinction in this regard between submission to the Almighty God, to a master by a slave, to a ruler by the subjects, or to the affluent by the needy: In reality, all of these acts of submission are forms of worship.

In any case, there is no way to deter a person from submitting themselves in this way, because it is based on an innate judgement from which humans cannot deviate unless they realize that which they believed was powerful and before which they abased themselves was not greater than

them as they assumed, but merely their own equal, for instance.

Hence, we observe that Islam did not prohibit the worship of deities other than God until it demonstrated to people that these deities were created beings like them, and that all power and glory belonged to God alone. As said in the Qur'an, in Sūrah al-Aʿrāf, *Indeed those whom you invoke besides Allah are creatures like you* (7:194); *Those whom you invoke besides Him can neither help you, nor help themselves. If you call them to guidance, they will not hear. You see them observing you, but they do not perceive* (7:198). Meanwhile, in Sūrah Āl ʿImrān, God says, *Say, 'O People of the Book! Come to a word common between us and you: that we will worship no one but Allah, and that we will not ascribe any partner to Him, and that we will not take each other as lords besides Allah.' But if they turn away, say, "Be witnesses that we are muslims.'* (3:64) This verse concludes by telling the faithful to affirm their submission to God after instructing them to refrain from worshipping other deities and rejecting submission to all beings who are created like themselves. In Sūrah al-Baqarah, we read: *power, altogether, belongs to Allah* (2:165); while Sūrah al-Nisā' says, *indeed all honor belongs to Allah* (4:139); and Sūrah al-Sajda reads, *You do not have besides Him any guardian or intercessor* (32:4). And there are countless other verses with similar meanings to these.

No entity other than God possesses the necessary qualities to demand our unqualified submission. Therefore, it is not appropriate to submit to anyone or anything other than Him, unless that submission is ultimately directed towards God. Any respect, reverence, or allegiance directed to anyone else must ultimately be oriented towards Him. As God states in the Qur'an, *those who follow the Messenger, the uninstructed prophet ... those who believe in him, honor him, and help him and follow the light that has been sent down with him, they are the felicitous* (7:157). He also says, *Your guardian is only Allah, His Messenger, and the faithful who maintain the prayer and give the zakat while bowing down* (5:55). Elsewhere, it is written, *But the faithful, men and women, are comrades of one another: they bid what is right and forbid what is wrong ...* (9:71), and *And whoever venerates the sacraments of Allah—indeed that arises from the Godwariness of hearts* (22:32). Hence, in Islam, there is no submission to anyone other than God unless this submission ultimately returns to Him and is intended for Him.

How did idolatry originate, and how did it begin?

As we established in the previous section, human beings have an innate desire to make abstract concepts substantial and shape intangible ideas into tangible forms through representation and imagery. At the same time, humans are instinctively drawn to submit to any superior, dominating force and to be obedient to its commands.

This is why we see that the spirit of polytheism and idolatry has historically prevailed in human societies. It is a phenomenon that seems almost impossible to prevent or avoid, even in modern, advanced societies, and even in those societies explicitly founded on the rejection of religion altogether. In these societies, we can see the erection of statues and images of people, the reverence and respect shown towards them, and the degree of submission to them calls to mind the idolatrous practices of the very earliest times and earliest humans. Nevertheless, today there are hundreds of millions of idolaters—in one form or another—on the face of the Earth, residing in its east and west.

With this in mind, we might hypothesise that idolatry among humans began with them making of statues of great men and raising up their likenesses, especially after their death, to serve as a memorial to them. Narrations from the Imāms of the Prophet's Household support this idea. For example, in *Tafsīr al-Qummī* and *'Ilal al-sharā'i'*, it is narrated from Imām al-Ṣādiq, commenting on the verse of the Qur'an: *They said, 'Do not abandon your gods...'* (71:23), that he stated: 'They used to worship God, but when they died, their people were grieved. Then Satan—may he be cursed by God!—came to them and suggested, 'Why not make statues in their image? Then you can look at them, find comfort in them, and worship God.' He then made idols resembling them, and the people continued to worship God, but also looked to these idols. When the winter and rains came, they took the idols into their houses.

They continued to worship God until that generation passed away. When their children grew up, they said, "Our forefathers used to worship these idols." Thus they started worshipping the idols instead of God. This is what God Almighty meant when He said, *They said '... Do not abandon Wadd, nor Suwa'* (71:23).

History records that, in ancient Rome and Greece, the master of a house would be worshipped in his own home and, when he died, an idol

was made in his honor for his household to worship. Many kings and great men were also deified by their people. For example, the Qur'an mentions Nimrod, the king who lived at the time of Abraham and debated with him about his Lord, and Pharaoh, who was the enemy of Moses. This is evident in today's places of idol worship, as well as in the ancient artefacts preserved from various religions which practice idolatry; there idols of many great religious figures, like the statues of Buddha and many Brahmin figures and others.

Their making of idols for the deceased and worshipping them, at the very least, show that these peoples did not believe that life ended with death but that people's spirits endured and they could continue to influence events and care for their families as they did during their lives. In fact, in some cases they might be thought to have become more powerful and influential because they were freed from the confines of material existence and limited from corporeal limitations. Consider the case of Pharaoh: He worshipped idols while he himself was considered a god and worshipped by his own people. As God said: "The chiefs of Pharaoh's people said: *The elite of Pharaoh's people said, 'Will you leave Moses and his people to cause corruption in the land, and to abandon you and your gods?'* (7:127).

Taking up idols as deities:

Creating statues for human beings seems to have stimulated the idea of creating an idol for God, even though people had not habitually created a physical representation of God thus far, as He is beyond definition or imagination. This fact seems to have deterred people from creating an idol for Him. Instead, they took divergent approaches, with each person focusing on what mattered to them most in the visible cosmic order, seeking to worship God through the mediation of the entity they believed God had delegated for managing that specific aspect of their existence.

For instance, peoples who lived along the coastlines worshipped the god of the sea, hoping to benefit from its bounty and to be spared from floods and tumultuous waves. People who inhabited valleys worshipped the god of the valley, while warriors worshipped the god of war, and so forth. In this way, it was not long before each individual fashioned a deity according to their own preferences, imagining for it a specific form and shape, and crafting it from metal, wood, stone, or some other material. It is reported

that the Banū Ḥanīfa tribe from Yamāma made an idol out of date cakes, which they ended up eating during a period of drought and hunger.

Equally, when a person came across a beautiful tree or stone, they might be inclined to worship it. They often sacrificed sheep or camels, smearing the blood on their chosen idol. If their livestock fell ill, they would bring it to the idol and rub it against it. Many trees were treated as deities and seen as sources of blessing, thus people were careful not to harm these trees by cutting or breaking them. Instead, they would seek to propitiate them with offerings, vows, and gifts.

This explosion of polytheism led people to diverge widely in their practices relating to idols, to the extent that these could hardly be captured systematically or fully accounted for. However, a common belief among idol worshippers was that they treated these idols as intercessors who would plead with God on their behalf to bring them good fortune and ward off evil. Some people may have even viewed the idol as a deity in its own right, independent of God and not just an intercessor with Him. Others may have viewed it as an intercessor but placed it before or above God Himself. For example, the Qur'an recounts in the verse: *But what is for their partners does not reach Allah, and what is for Allah reaches their partners* (6:136).

Some idolaters worshipped angels, others worshipped jinn, some worshipped fixed stars like Sirius, and a group considered the planets (which they believed were 'wandering stars') as gods. All of these practices have been touched upon in the Qur'an, and they did all of this either out of desire to obtain benefit from these false deities or in order to ward off their perceived harm.

It was rare for people to worship a deity other than the One God without creating an idol to which they directed their worship. Whenever they chose something as an intercessory being, they created an idol for it from wood, stone, or metal. They fashioned it into a representation of what they imagined it to embody in terms of life, creating it in the form of a human or an animal, even if the entity the idol represented didn't necessarily align with this form, such as the fixed stars, planets, or gods of knowledge, love, provision, war, and so on.

The rationale behind adopting idols as partners to God lies in peoples belief that, because God is transcendent and beyond sensory perception, like the deities representing various species and all other non-material

deities, or because His appearance isn't fixed, like a star that transitions from rising to setting, making it difficult to focus on it whenever one wishes, it is necessary to create an idol to represent His attributes and qualities and to which worship can be directed. Hence, they would turn to the idol as a means of reaching the deity whenever they desired.

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Sabaeanism:

Even though all idolatry—roughly speaking—originates from the same source of seeking intercessors with God and worshipping their idols and images, and despite its dominance over the earth and the human world, as the Qur'an relates about the nations of Noah, Abraham, and Moses, the differences between the various groups of idolaters because of their divergent whims and superstitions are so great that making an exhaustive list of all the various idol worshipping faiths and their unique practices is almost impossible. This is doubly so because most of these faiths do not rely on established principles or consistent, harmonious rules.

However, the Sabaeans, Brahmans, and Buddhists could all be counted as relatively organized, stable, and established sects of idol worship.

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As for the Sabaean religion, it is built on linking the phenomena and events of the terrestrial world to celestial bodies like the Sun, Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. They believe that these celestial bodies, with their associated spirits, govern the observable world, each managing the events related to it as determined by the science of astrology. The cycle of worldly events is believed to repeat with the recurrence of the orbits of these celestial bodies indefinitely and without end.

The Sabaeans believe these celestial bodies serve as intermediaries between God and the observable world and that worshipping them brings humans closer to Him. Consequently, it is necessary to create idols and images for these entities, and then worship these idols and images to draw closer to them, in order to draw closer to the supreme Godhead.

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Historical chronicles report that the person who established and refined the religious doctrines of the Sabaeans was Yudhāsaf, an astrologer who appeared in India during the reign of Tahmuras, the Shah of Iran. He propagated his teachings and amassed a large number of followers during his lifetime. His teachings even spread to regions like Rome, Greece, Babylon, and elsewhere. Temples and shrines were built, housing idols

representing the various celestial bodies, each with their own set of rules, customs, sacrifices, and offerings that were managed by a dedicated priesthood. They have occasionally been accused of human sacrifice.

Sabaeans assert the oneness of God in His divinity, not in His worship. They believe He is transcendent above any deficiencies or imperfections, and believe that He must be described through negations rather than affirmations, such as saying He is not impotent, ignorant, mortal, unjust, or oppressive. They refer to these attributes the Most Beautiful Names, but they do not claim that these names represent any absolute reality. We have discussed some of the Sabaean's history in our commentary on the verse, *Indeed the faithful, the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabaeans* (2:62) in the first volume of this work.

Brahmanism:

Bahmanism (or Hinduism), as we have already mentioned, is one of the most well-established idolatrous religions. It is perhaps the oldest human religion, as Indian civilization is one of the earliest human civilizations, which appears to have begun in pre-history. It is not clear when Indian peoples began to worship idols, but the classical historian al-Masʿūdī[1] has said that Brahman was the name of the first king of India, who founded the country, established the foundations of civilization therein, and dispensed justice amongst its people.

If this is true, it is likely that Brahmanism originated sometime after him and was named in his honor. Many past nations have worshipped their kings and nobility, believing that they possessed supernatural authority and that divinity was manifested in them in some way. This is somewhat corroborated by the content of the Vedas, a body of scripture, which was

1 Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī al-Masʿūdī (d. 345/956) was an Islamic geographer and historian. In addition to the classical Islamic sciences, al-Masʿūdī also studied so-called "ancient sciences" such as philosophy, astronomy, and medicine. He travelled widely throughout regions such as Iran, India, Yemen, and the Mediterranean. He is credited with around forty-six works, of which only two have survived: *Murūj al-dhahab* ('The Meadows of Gold') and *al-Tanbih wa al-ishraf*. These books provide valuable insights into geography, history, and culture. In fact, al-Masʿūdī's writings are essential for understanding the cultural history of Southwest Asia. (Trans.)

compiled from various letters and treatises. Each part was written by different religious men in different eras. These were inherited by their successors, who compiled them and bound them into a book to serve as the basis for a systematic religion. This has been confirmed by scholars of Sanskrit. Therefore, it is inevitable that Brahmanism, like other sects of idolatry, began with rudimentary ideas, which went through stages of evolution and integration until it reached its peak of perfection.

Below is a summary of the information compiled by al-Bustānī[1] in his encyclopaedia, the *Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif*:

'Brahm (Brahma) is the first and greatest deity worshipped by the Hindus. For them, he is the origin of all existence; a singular, unchanging, and unknowable eternal entity. He precedes all creation and created the whole world in one go simply by willing it and uttering the word '*Om*', which means 'be.'

The story of Brahm is quite similar to the story of the Buddha in many respects, with the differences mainly in the name and attributes. The Hindus often regard Brahm himself as the name for the three hypostases that constitute the Hindu Trinity, namely, Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. The worshippers of Brahma are known as Brahmans or Brahmins.

As for Brahma, this is the name given to Brahm after he began his works (which is indicated by the addition of the 'a' at the end). He is the first hypostasis of the Hindu Trinity, meaning that Brahm manifests himself in three hypostases each time; the first hypostasis that appears is Brahma, the second is Vishnu, and the third is Shiva.

When Brahma emerged, he spent a long period sitting under a fig tree called 'Kamala' in Hindi and 'Bodhi' in Sanskrit, looking in every direction. With four heads and eight eyes, all he could see was a vast, dark expanse filled with water. He was taken aback by this and was unable to comprehend the secret of his origin, so he remained silent, engrossed in contemplation.

Generations had passed when, suddenly, a voice rang in his ears, rousing him from his slumber and urging him to rush to 'Bagadan' , a title for Brahm. Brahm then appeared as a man with a thousand heads. Brahma

1 This is Buṭrus al-Bustānī (d. 1883), a Lebanese Maronite intellectual who is famous for producing a multi-volume Arabic encyclopaedia— the *Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif*. (Trans.)

prostrated before him and began to glorify him. Bagadan's chest expanded, he emanated light, dispelled the darkness, and revealed to his servant the state of his existence and all beings in the form of dormant seeds, giving him the power to bring them out of their torpor.

Brahma contemplated this for a hundred divine years, equivalent to thirty-six thousand solar years, before he began his work. He first created the seven heavens, known to them as 'Svarga', and illuminated them with celestial bodies known as 'devas'. He then created 'Mrityuloka', the abode of death, followed by the earth and its moon. Afterwards, he created the seven lower realms known as 'Patala' and illuminated them with eight gems placed on the heads of eight serpents.

The seven heavens and the seven lower abodes constitute the fourteen worlds in Hindu mythology.

Then, Brahma created seven pairs to assist him in his work, but ten of them, 'Muni' and the nine 'Rishis', including 'Narada', refused to help and were solely devoted to worldly contemplations. Therefore, he married his sister 'Saraswati' and they had a hundred children. The first-born was named 'Daksha.' Daksha had fifty daughters, thirteen of whom married 'Kashyapa', who is sometimes called 'the first Brahman'. He fathered a son named 'Marichi' for Brahma.

One of the aforementioned daughters, named 'Āditi', gave birth to the enlightened spirits known as 'devas', which perform good deeds and inhabit the heavens. Her sister 'Diti' gave birth to a large number of evil spirits known as 'Daityas' or 'Asuras', inhabitants of the dark, responsible for all evil in the world.

The earth was uninhabited at this point. Some say that Brahma brought forth Swayambhuva Manu—the first man—from himself, while others claim that he existed before him and is actually the same as the god Brahma. Then Brahma married him to Shatarupa—the first woman—and instructed them to be fruitful and multiply.

Others say that Brahma had four sons: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra. The first came from his mouth, the second from his right arm, the third from his right thigh, and the fourth from his right foot. These four became the progenitors of the four primary castes of human beings.

The latter three sons married three women who also came forth from him: one from his right arm, the second from his left thigh, and the third

from his left foot. They were named after their husbands with the addition of the feminine suffix "ni". Brahmin also married a wife descended his father, but she was from the wicked Asura lineage. This is what the Vedas say about the creation of the world.

After being a powerful creator god, Brahma fell from his rank to Vishnu, the second person of the trinity, and Shiva, the third person. This was because he became puffed up with pride and vanity, considering himself equal to the Supreme Godhead. He fell into Naraka, or Hell, and was only forgiven on the condition that he incarnate once in each of the four yugas (or world ages within a cosmic cycle). He first incarnated as a poetic raven named 'Kakabhushunda', then as the poet 'Valmiki' who was first a thief, then a stern and penitent man, and finally a famous interpreter of the Vedas and author of the Sanskrit epic the *Ramayana*. In his third incarnation, he was Vyasa, the poet and author of the other great Sanskrit epic the *Mahabharata*, as well as the *Bhagavata Purana*, and several other *Puranas*, or works of lore and legend. In his fourth incarnation, in the current age, which is known as the Kali Yuga, he became Kalidasa,[1] the great allegorical poet, author of the play *Abhijñānaśākuntala*, and editor of Valmiki's works.

Brahma has appeared in three states. In the first state, he was the One, the Eternal, the All, the Supreme. In the second state, he emerged from the first, active in creation. In the third state, he appeared incarnated as a human and a sage.

Brahma is not widely worshipped in India; he has only one temple there. However, the Brahmans, who make him the object of their worship, invoke him in the evening and the morning. They throw water three times with the palms of their hands onto the ground and towards the sun, and they renew their worship at midday by offering him a flower. In the consecration of fire, they offer him clarified butter, as they offer to the god of fire. This ceremony is more important and sacred than anything else in their faith, and its name is Homa or Havan.

Brahma is typically depicted as a man with a long beard, in one hand the chain of beings, and in the other, the vessel containing the heavenly

1 (Translator's note: Kalidasa was a historical figure who lived in the 4th–5th Century C.E. He was a Sanskrit poet and playwright.)

water of life. He is riding Hamsa, the divine bird that resembles a stork or an eagle.

Brahmin is the first-born son of Brahma, who was brought forth from his mouth, as we mentioned earlier. His contribution was the four holy books, called the "Vedas", symbolic of the four words he spoke from his four mouths.

When Brahmin wanted to marry like his siblings, Brahma told him: 'You were born for study and prayer, so you must abstain from physical relations.' However, Brahmin was not convinced by his father's words, which angered Brahma. He then married him to one of the wicked demonic creatures who are known as asura. From this union came the Brahmans, the sacred priests, who were given the exclusive duty of interpreting the Vedas. They were entrusted with all the offerings that the Hindus presented to the gods.

The Kshatriya, the warrior caste, was born from Brahma, as were the Vaisyas, the agricultural caste, and the Sudras, the servant caste. Thus, the followers of Brahmanism belong to one of four primary castes.

Others mention that the Brahman society is divided into four classes: the religious scholars, the warriors, the farmers, and the traders. Women and servants are not given much regard. In the our commentary on the verse *O you who have faith! Take care of your own souls* ... (5:105), we have presented a scholarly discussion about the book *Mā li al-Hind* by Abū Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī[1] about the practices and rituals of the Brahmans. Also, there can be found there excerpts from al-Shahrastānī's[2] *al-Milal wa*

1 (Translator's note: Abū Rayḥān Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Bīrūnī (362/973-after 442/1050), was a scholar and polymath during the late Samanid and early Ghaznavid periods and, along with Ibn Sīnā, was one of the two prominent intellectuals of his era in the eastern Muslim lands. He wrote works on astronomy, mathematics, ethnography, history, and geography. Having embarked on a journey to the Indian subcontinent in 1017, he delved into the study of Indian culture and extensively documented his findings in a treatise titled *Mā li al-Hind* or *A Description of India*.)

2 (Translator's note: Abū al-Fatḥ Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī was a theologian and scholar of religious and philosophical doctrines who lived in Iran in the early 6th/12th century. Amongst other things, he is famous for his encyclopaedic work titled *al-Milal wa al-niḥal* or *Creeds and Sects*, in which he catalogued the various religions and sects of his world.)

al-niḥal on the practices of the Sabaeans.

Like the Sabians, Hindus also firmly believe in reincarnation. They believe that there are an infinite number of worlds in both the past and the future, and each has a destined period of existence. When its time ends, its form ceases to exist and another world is born from it, which lives, dies, and is replaced by a third, and so on. Human souls, associated with bodies, do not die when their bodies die; rather, the death of their bodies is the beginning of a new life for them. They attach themselves to other bodies in which they live. If they have acquired spiritual virtues and performed good deeds in their previous bodies, they will live happily; if they have indulged in vices and committed evil deeds, they will live unhappily. Only those perfect in their knowledge of Brahma (God Almighty) are alive with eternal life, safe from a second birth and exempt from the fate of reincarnation.

Buddhism

Buddhism[1] can be seen as an effort to reform the teachings of Brahmanism. It was founded by Buddha Sakyamuni, who, according to the *Chronicle of Ceylon*, died in 543 B.C.E. Other sources disagree with this date, however, some by as much as two thousand years. This led some historians to suspect that the Buddha might be a mythical figure with no basis in historical fact. However, recent archaeological excavations appear to confirm his existence, and other newly found artefacts have revealed further information about his life and the teachings he gave to his disciples and followers.

Before founding the movement that is named after him, the Buddha belonged to a royal family as the son of King Suddhodana. However, he rejected worldly enjoyments and retreated from society in his youth. He spent many years of his life in solitude in the wilderness, dedicated to asceticism and spiritual discipline, until he achieved enlightenment. Emerging from his solitude at the age of thirty-six, as reported, he called upon people to liberate themselves from misery and suffering and to attain supreme tranquillity and everlasting celestial life. He urged them to adhere to his teachings, cultivate noble ethics, renounce desires, and avoid vice.

Reportedly, Buddha stated about himself with the utmost humility: 'I

1 This section is also based on al-Bustānī's encyclopaedia.

am a beggar. There is but one law for all, which is the severe punishment for criminals and the great reward for the righteous. My law is a law of grace for everyone. Like the sky, it accommodates men and women, boys and girls, the rich and the poor, although it is difficult for the rich to follow it.'

According to Buddhists, the Buddha's teachings emphasized that nature is fundamentally empty and illusory, that non-existence pervades every place and every time, and that it is filled with deceit. However, they also believe that this very concept of non-existence removes all barriers between different human castes, peoples, and worldly nations, and makes the even the lowliest of worms brethren to the Buddhists.

Buddhists believe that the last words uttered by Sakyamuni were: 'All component things in the world are impermanent.' Their ultimate goal is the salvation of the soul from all pain and vanity. They believe that the endless cycle of reincarnation ends or ceases by preventing the soul from being born again, which is achieved by purifying it from all desire—even the desire to exist.

These fundamental principles of Buddhism are explicitly present in its earliest teachings recorded in the Arya Saccani or Four Noble Truths) They are ascribed to the Buddha and were reportedly mentioned in his first sermon, which he delivered in a deer park near Benares.

The Four Noble Truths concern the nature of suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the path leading to its cessation. The first truth is that suffering is birth, ageing, illness, death, encountering what is unpleasant, separation from what is loved, and not getting what one desires. The second truth is that suffering is caused by carnal desires and emotional cravings. The third truth is the path to the cessation of all such desires and wants. The path to cessation consists of eight divisions (the Noble Eightfold Path): right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. This forms the core of the Buddhist faith, which can be found inscribed on many structures and recorded in several books.

The essence of Buddhist morality is to avoid all base things, do all things that are good, and cultivate the mind.

This is what has been handed down from Buddha's teachings. Aside from this, the rituals, sacrifices, priesthood, philosophies, and other mysteries were added over time and throughout the ages. These additions

include remarkable sayings and opinions on the creation of the world, its organization, and other matters.

It is said that Buddha never spoke of God, not out of disregard for the fact of His existence or a denial of it, but because he devoted all his efforts to preparing people to renounce the allure of worldly life and to develop an aversion for this fleeting abode.

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Pre-Islamic Arab idolatry

The pagan Arabs were the first idol worshippers to be challenged by Islam, which called for monotheism against their widespread polytheism. During the pre-Islamic period, most Arabs lived in nomadic tribes. The more cultured among them, like the Yemenis, were essentially nomadic in nature, governed by a mix of diverse customs and traditions, which were borrowed from their powerful neighbors such as the Persians, Romans, Egyptians, Abyssinians, and Indians. These customs included their religious practices.

The ancient ancestors of these Arabs—the "original" Arabs, you might say—such as the ʿĀd, Iram, and Thamūd, were pagans, as God Almighty narrates in His Book about the people of Hūd and Ṣāliḥ, and about the dwellers of Madyan and the people of Sheba in the story of Solomon and the Hoopoe. That was the case until the arrival of Abraham with his wife Hagar and their son Ishmael in the land of Mecca, which was a barren valley inhabited by the tribe of Jurhum. They settled there, and Ishmael grew up, the city of Mecca was built, and Abraham built the Kaaba, the Sacred House. He called people to his upright religion, which was Islam, and his call was answered in the Hijaz and surrounding regions. He instituted the ritual of the Ḥajj pilgrimage for them, as illustrated by what God Almighty told him in the Qur'an: *And proclaim the Ḥajj to people: they shall come to you on foot and on lean camels coming from distant places* (22:27).

Later, some of the Arab nomads converted to Judaism through their interactions with the Jewish tribes who had settled in the Hejaz, while Christianity infiltrated some regions of the Peninsula, and Zoroastrianism in others.

Subsequently, conflicts arose between the descendants of Ishmael and the tribe of Jurhum in Mecca, eventually resulting in the dominance of the Ishmaelites and the expulsion of Jurhum from the area. Subsequently,

ʿAmr ibn Luḥayy took control of Mecca and its surrounding territories.

ʿAmr fell gravely ill, and some suggested to him that the hot springs in the Balqa region of Sham (Greater Syria) might offer a cure. Upon visiting these springs and regaining his health, he observed people worshipping idols there. He inquired about this practice, and was told that they worshipped these idols, shaped after heavenly bodies and human figures, to grant them victory over their enemies and to bring them rain for their crops. Intrigued, he requested one of their idols, and was given Hubal. Upon returning to Mecca, he placed it in the Kaʿba. Along with him were also Isāf and Nāʾila, two idols depicted as a couple—or as two youths, according to other sources. He called on people to worship these idols, and this practice took hold among his tribe, and they resumed idol worship after their period of monotheistic faith. They had previously been known as *ḥanif*s, followers of the Abrahamic faith, but while they retained the name, they abandoned the meaning, and the term came to refer to the pagans among them as well.

One factor that facilitated their shift toward polytheism was the reverence that all religions—including Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and paganism combined—held for the holy Kaʿba. No one would leave Mecca without carrying a stone from the holy sanctuary to take with them its blessings and sanctity. Wherever they settled, they would place the stone on the ground and circumambulate it in imitation of and out of love for the Kaʿba and the sanctuary that surrounded it.

This is how polytheism spread among the Arab Bedouins and those who had adopted the Arab lifestyle. Monotheists among them were rare and are scarcely mentioned in historical sources. The well-known idols they worshipped include Hubal, Isāf, and Nāʾila, introduced by ʿAmr b. Luḥayy who invited people to worship them, as well as al-Lāt, al-ʿUzza, Manāt, Wadd, Suwāʾ, Yāghūth, Yaʿūq, and Nasr. These eight idols are mentioned in the Qur'an, and the last five are said to have belonged to the people of Noah in particular.

In *al-Kāfī*, al-Kulaynī narrates via a chain of transmission going back to ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ashall, a vendor of carpets, who narrated from Imām al-Ṣādiq: 'Yāghūth was placed facing the entrance of the Kaʿba, with Yaʿūq on its right and Nasr on its left.'

The narration also mentions: 'Hubal was on the roof of the Kaaba, and

Isāf and Nā'ila were stationed on Ṣafā and Marwa.' In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, we read: 'Wadd was an idol of the tribe of Kalb, Suwāʿ was for that of Hudhayl, Yāghūth for the tribe of Murād, Yaʿūq for the tribe of Hamdān, and Nasr for the tribe of Huṣayn.'

The religion practiced by the pre-Islamic Arabs contained traces of Sabaean teachings, such as bathing to purify oneself following sexual intercourse and other such practices.

It also contained elements of Brahmanism, such as belief in world eras and the in time as the ultimate reality. *They say, 'There is nothing but the life of this world: we live and we die, and nothing but time destroys us'* (45:24). Some mention that this is the belief of the materialists who deny the existence of a creator altogether.

There were traces of the original religion of Abraham, such as circumcision and the Ḥajj pilgrimage. However, these had been mixed with pagan practices such as touching the idols around the Kaʿba, circumambulating the Kaʿba naked, and the polytheistic invocations they would recite, such as: 'I come to you, O Allah, I come to you. You have no partner, except your partner. He is yours and all that is his is yours.'

They also innovated other practices, such as belief in the *baḥīra*, the *sā'iba*, the *waṣīla*, and the *ḥām*, belief in the *sadā*, the *ḥām*, *al-anṣāb* (sacrificial alters), and *al-azlām* (diving arrows), among other practices mentioned in historical records. We have explained the meanings of the *baḥīra*, the *sā'iba*, the *waṣīla*, and the *ḥām* in our commentary on verse 5:103, and of the *anṣāb* and *azlām* in our commentary on verses 3 and 90.

Islam's defence of monotheism and its confrontation with polytheism

Throughout the ages, the divine message has continuously confronted idolatry, stood up against it, and called people to follow the path of monotheism. This is what we find God has recounted in the Qur'an in the stories of prophets and messengers such as Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Abraham, Jethro, and Moses; this is also referenced in the stories of Jesus, Lot, and Jonah.

The most comprehensive statement in this regard is the verse: *We did not send any messenger before you but We revealed to him that 'There is no god except Me; so worship Me'* (21:25).

The Prophet Muḥammad began his public mission by calling the idol

worshippers of his people to monotheism using wisdom, preaching, and arguing in the best of ways. However, his appeals were met with mockery, persecution, and severe torment for those who followed him. This state of affairs compelled a group of the early Muslims to abandon their homes in Mecca and seek refuge in Abyssinia. The idol worshippers of Mecca then conspired to assassinate the Prophet, which led him to emigrate to Medina, followed by many of the believers.

However, even though he had left behind his home, his enemies would not relent. They waged war on the Muslims, fighting them at the Battles of Badr, Uḥud, the Trench, and in numerous other armed confrontations until God granted His Prophet a decisive victory over them with the conquest of Mecca. The Prophet then purged the Sacred House and the Sacred Precinct of their idols, breaking the graven images erected in and around the Kaʿba. It is said that Hubal, the largest of their idols, was placed atop the Kaaba, and ʿAlī was ordered to climb up and cast it to the ground. This idol, as they claim, was subsequently buried at the threshold of the mosque's entrance.

Islam has been particularly diligent in abolishing idolatry, purging people's hearts of any thoughts leading to it, guiding minds away from even contemplating it. This is evident in the fundamental teachings, noble morals, and legal precepts that Islam promotes. It establishes a fundamental belief in monotheism, that there is no god but God, with His most beautiful names, who is the Lord of everything. He alone possesses the primordial existence that is independent of anything else, and He is Self-Sufficient, in no need of the worlds or their denizens. Everything other than Him begins with and returns to Him and is dependent on Him for its existence and survival. Thus, anyone who attributes any form of independence to anything besides Him, whether in its essence, its attributes, or its actions, is considered a polytheist according to this criterion.

Islam calls on people to rely on God and place their trust in God, to accept God's sovereignty, love for the sake of God, hate for the sake of God, and to dedicate all of their deeds to God. It prohibits them from relying on anything other than God, placing their trust in others, feeling secure with the outward causes of this world, or having hope in anyone other than Him, or from behaving arrogantly or vainly. All these things involve attributing independence to entities other than God, which leads

to polytheism and idol worship.

Equally, Islam prohibits people from prostrating themselves to anything other than God, creating statues that cast shadows, or drawing living beings. It forbids obedience to anyone other than God or heeding them in their commands and prohibitions unless such obedience is ultimately directed to obeying God, as is the case with obeying the Prophets and religious leaders. It also prohibits contriving new things in matters of religion and following in the footsteps of Satan.

The traditions that have come down to us from the Prophet and the Imāms of his Household consistently state that polytheism (*shirk*) has both blatant (*jalī*) and hidden (*khafī*) forms, that it also has many levels and only the truly dedicated can avoid entirely. The most hidden form of polytheism is said to be harder to perceive than the sound of an ant's footfall on smooth stone in the darkest night. It is reported in *al-Kāfī*, from Imām al-Ṣādiq, concerning the verse of the Qur'an: ... *the day when neither wealth nor children will avail, except him who comes to Allah with a sound heart,'* (26:88–89): 'The sound heart is one which meets God without anyone besides Him in it. Every heart that contains polytheism or doubt is fallen. Their asceticism in this worldly life is only intended to allow their hearts to focus on the afterlife.'

Also, it has been reported that worshipping God out of a desire for paradise is the worship of hirelings, and worshipping Him out of fear of hellfire is the worship of slaves, while the true essence of worship is to worship Him out of love for Him, and that this is the worship of the noble (*kirām*). This is a hidden spiritual station that only the purified can attain. Several of these traditions have been presented in previous sections of this book.

The entirety of the Prophet's method was founded upon the principle of monotheism and the denial of partners to God. Moreover, God Almighty has commanded that the Prophet's methods, which He has ordered him to adopt and follow in human society, be based on the following verse: *Say, 'O People of the Book! Come to a word common between us and you: that we will worship no one but Allah, and that we will not ascribe any partner to Him, and that we will not take each other as lords besides Allah.' But if they turn away, say, 'Be witnesses that we are muslims'* (3:64).

God has also criticized the People of the Book for allowing pagan beliefs

and practices to infiltrate their religion: *Say, 'O People of the Book! Do not unduly exceed the bounds in your religion and do not follow the fancies of a people who went astray in the past, and led many astray, and* (*themselves*) *strayed from the right path*' (5:77).

Moreover, God rebukes them in the following terms: *They have taken their scribes and their monks as lords besides Allah, and also Christ, Mary's son; though they were commanded to worship only the One God, there is no god except Him; He is far too immaculate to have any partners that they ascribe!* (9:31).

The Prophet treated all people equally when applying the divine laws and enforcing God's bounds. He bridged the gaps between different social classes such as the ruler and the ruled, the leader and the led, the servant and the served, the rich and the poor, men and women, the noble and the humble. And he established the principle that there is no honor, pride, or rule for any person over another except by virtue of their piety, and judgement belongs to God alone.

The Prophet distributed wealth equitably and forbade the powerful from displaying their strength in a way that would harm or dispirit the weak and abased, such as the rich flaunting their wealth before the poor and needy, and rulers and leaders exercising their power over their subjects arbitrarily.

The Prophet lived as one of the people, distinguishing himself from them neither in food, drink, clothing, seating, walking, nor anything else. A summary of his life can be found in the final part of the sixth section of this book.

Additional Remarks:

In this context, we will weigh the teachings of the Qur'an by comparing them to the doctrines of Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Christianity, in a broad and comprehensive manner across various topics, in a scholarly and analytical fashion.

The concept of Reincarnation among the Pagans:

One of the primary beliefs that informs the foundations of Hinduism, as well as Buddhism and Sabaeanism, is that of reincarnation. This doctrine holds that the cosmos is continually subjected to cycles of creation and

destruction. The observable world which we inhabit, as well as its various parts, is believed to have been formed from a previous world, and this cycle repeats indefinitely. This world will decay as its parts continue to do so, and a new world will be formed from it, and so on ad infinitum. The human being lives in each of these worlds based on whatever they have acquired in a preceding world. Those who do good deeds and cultivate noble virtues will, after death, attach their souls to a blissful body and live in happiness as a reward in their next cycle. Conversely, those who are overly attached to the material world and follow their desires instead of cultivating virtue will inhabit a wretched body after death, suffering various kinds of torment. The only exception to this cycle of death and rebirth are those who recognise Brahman and unite with him. Such individuals escape from the cycle of death and rebirth and return instead as eternal, timeless entities that embody splendor, joy, life, power, and knowledge, and who are immune to annihilation and destruction.

Based on this, it is a religious duty for humans to believe in Brahman (who is the source of everything, analogous to God) and draw closer to him through sacrifices and acts of worship. They should adorn themselves with noble virtues and perform righteous deeds. If one's worldly desires subside and they cultivate noble qualities, engage in good acts, and recognise Brahman through self-awareness, they become a Brahmin and unite with Brahman, achieving a state of oneness. This is the greatest form of happiness and purest form of life. If one fails to attain this level in their current life, they should still believe in him and do good deeds to find happiness in their subsequent life, which is their next life.

However, since Brahman is an absolute entity, encompassing everything and not encompassed by anything else, he is too high and exalted for human beings to comprehend, except through negating all imperfections from him, or to approach directly through worship and sacrifice. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to draw closer to him through worshipping his deputies and the most potent of his creations so that they may intercede with him for us. These are the deities who Hindus worship besides God through their idols. Within their multitude are beings we would recognise as angels, jinn, or the spirits of holy men. The jinn are worshipped out of fear of the harm they can cause, while others are worshipped in hope of their mercy and fear of their wrath. Among their

number are beings who are recognized as the consorts, sons, and daughters of God Almighty.

This is a summary of the doctrines of Brahmanism as taught by the Brahman scholars themselves.

However, the contents of the *Upanishads*[1], which constitute the fourth section of the sacred *Vedas*, does not entirely agree with the general outline of their faith given above, even if the Brahman sect scholars teach it.

A critical investigator finds that the message of the *Upanishads*, which convey divine teachings (even if they do describe the divine world and matters related to it, such as the divine names, attributes, and actions—including creation, sustenance, life-giving, death, and the like—in ways akin to the descriptions of physical materialistic matters like division, dispersal, stillness, movement, transition, settlement, unification, greatness, and smallness, among other physical-material states) explicitly state in certain parts that Brahman is an absolute, transcendental entity, beyond the reach of even the most beautiful names and supreme attributes of life, knowledge, and power, and utterly devoid of attributes of deficiency and the physical-material characteristics, and there is nothing like unto it.

They clearly state that the transcendent One is a unique entity, not born of anything, and has not given birth to anything, and there is nothing comparable or equivalent to Him in any way.

They also assert that truthfully, that none other than He should be worshipped, and no one else should be approached through offerings and sacrifices. Rather, He alone, without any partner, is deserving of worship.

Moreover, they frequently affirm the truth of resurrection and state that He is the ultimate end to which all creation will ultimately return. They describe the rewards and punishments of deeds after death in a manner that does not preclude the possibility of being understood as referring to the intermediate state (*Barzakh*) rather than to reincarnation.

It is particularly telling that these philosophical texts do not make any mention of idols or deities besides Brahman, let alone advocate worshipping

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1 The *Upanishad*s are ancient Indian texts composed between 700 and 300 B.C.E. in Sanskrit. They explore philosophical questions about being, the self, life's foundation, death, the good life, and human interactions. Considered the origin of India's diverse philosophical tradition, they were part of the *Veda*s and composed in a ritual context. (Trans.)

or making offerings to them.

What we have cited from the *Upanishads*—and there is much more we have omitted—are, without a doubt, sublime truths and veritable knowledge that are in harmony with our innate human nature. As you can see, they clearly refute the doctrines of idol worship discussed at the beginning of the study.

In fact, careful consideration leads us to the conclusion that these texts were actually lofty truths revealed to select individuals who were close to God. These individuals then conveyed what they discovered to some of their disciples, although they often spoke symbolically and used parables to illustrate their teachings.

These teachings, only grasped by the few, became the foundation upon which the everyday life—which constitutes the religion embraced by the general public—was based. These are profound insights, comprehensible only to a few knowledgeable individuals due to their elevated nature that surpass the physical and imaginative levels of human understanding, which is how the majority perceive things. Their intricacy challenges untrained intellects that are not accustomed to divine knowledge.

This knowledge, exclusive to the minority, and denied to the majority, is essentially a humanistic religion. However, we must be careful in our conclusions, because our God-given human nature also fosters societal engagement. To disconnect one group of people from others based on religious beliefs contradicts this human instinct and the divinely instituted cosmic order. This, indeed, is to abandon the path of reason, which is one of the three ways of attaining true knowledge—namely, divine revelation, mystical insight, and rational thought. Among these, intellect is the most commonly used and the most essential for human life in this world. Divine revelation is granted only to the infallible prophets, and spiritual insight is accessible only to the most devoted of individuals who possess firm conviction. Yet, everyone, including those who receive revelation and insight, must employ rational argument in all aspects of worldly life. To do otherwise means to impose blind conformity on all aspects of human society and human flourishing—beliefs, morals, and actions—which leads to the downfall of humankind.

Moreover, to eschew the use of reason reinforces the tradition of subjugation within human societies, and this is evidenced by extensive historical

experiences of human civilizations that have lived under the yoke of idolatrous religions or have followed the tradition of subjugation by worshipping lords other than God.

The Universality of these Dangers Among All Religions

Other mainstream religions, despite their claim to monotheistic beliefs, have not been immune to the pitfalls of idol worship, leading them to encounter the same problems that the religion of Brahmanism faced, especially the three major issues mentioned above.

For example, Buddhism and Sabaeanism clearly exhibit these problems, and history testifies to this fact. Some of their beliefs and practices have already been mentioned.

As for the Zoroastrians, they attribute divinity to Ahura Mazda, but they also revere Yazdan, Ahriman, the angels entrusted with divine affairs, the sun, fire, and other things. History tells us of the servitude and class differences that prevailed in their societies as well. Careful reflection leads us to conclude that these issues arose due to the distortion of their original faith. It has been reported that the Prophet said about them: 'They had a prophet whom they killed, and a book which they burned.'

Regarding the Jews, the Qur'an frequently condemns their actions, their distortion of God's book, and their practice of taking their scholars as lords beside God, as well as the misfortunes God afflicted them with due to their straying from the natural order and immoral behaviors.

As for the Christians, we have extensively discussed their deviations in their beliefs and practices in the third part of this book. If you wish, review the prologue of the Gospel of John and Paul's letters in relation to the rest of the Gospels, and complement it with a review of the history of the Church. A full treatment of this is beyond the scope of our present discussion.

Therefore, an in-depth investigation into these matters leads us to conclude that the general misfortunes faced by religious societies across the human world are the legacy of the original idolatry. This idolatry took divine knowledge and supreme truths, used them as the basis of religious norms, and imposed these without recourse to reason on the understanding of the common folk which is mainly inclined towards sensory and perceptible things. This had the expected results.

How did Islam address these erroneous beliefs?

The approach Islam adopted in reforming these flawed doctrines is by presenting the divine truths in a clear and straightforward language that was digestible and comprehensible to the minds of ordinary people. Therefore, the teachings of Islam were such that people could apprehend them as if through a veil or receive them in a suitable garb. This makes these teachings appropriate for the common folk, while those with special insight can still gain direct access to them in their unveiled and manifest splendor, without the need for such mediation. Such people are the convinced believers who constitute the ranks of those blessed by God: the prophets, the truthful, martyrs, and the righteous—very fine company indeed. God says, *By the Manifest Book: We have made it an Arabic Qur'an so that you may apply reason, and indeed it is with Us in the Mother Book* (*and it is*) *surely sublime and wise* (43:2–4). He also says, *This is indeed a noble Qur'an, in a guarded Book,—no one touches it except the pure ones*—(56:79). Moreover, the Prophet himself has said, 'We, the company of the prophets, were commanded to speak to people according to the capacity of their intellects.'

Islam guarded against the dangers of idolatry and polytheism at the level of monotheism by affirming that nothing was independent in its essence or attributes except God Almighty, who is the Sustainer of all things. It presented an understanding of divinity that avoided the extremes of both anthropomorphism and unknowability. God was described as living, but not with a life like ours; knowing, but not with a knowledge like ours; powerful, but not with a power like ours; hearing, but not with a hearing like ours; and seeing, but not with a sight like ours. In sum, there is nothing like unto Him, and He is greater than can be described. Despite this, people were instructed not to assert anything about Him without knowledge and not to adhere to a belief unless it is based on a rational proof that made sense to their minds and intellects.

In doing so, Islam managed to present religion equally to both the masses and the spiritual elite. Secondly, it allowed the healthy intellect to operate without squandering this divine gift. Thirdly, it brought together different classes in human society to the greatest degree possible without favoring one over another or prioritizing one and neglecting another. God says, *Indeed this community of yours is one community, and I am your Lord. So worship Me* (21:92). And He says, *O mankind! Indeed We created you*

from a male and a female, and made you nations and tribes that you may identify yourselves with one another. Indeed the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most Godwary among you (49:13).

This is merely a summary; more detailed arguments can be found dispersed throughout this commentary.

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Supplications, Intercession, and Visitation

One might suspect that the contents of some of our supplications, seeking intercession through the Prophet and his Household, invoking God in their name, visiting their graves, kissing them, seeking the blessings of the soil around them, and venerating their relics, is a form of idolatry or polytheism and, therefore, prohibited. One might argue that this kind of devotional orientation bestows a divine hue to something other than God and that this is idolatry. The idolaters committed polytheism because they said about their idols: 'These are our intercessors before God,' and they said, 'We only worship them to bring us closer to God.' Therefore, so the argument goes, it does not matter what you venerate besides God, whether it is a prophet, a saint, a tyrannical king, or anyone else; all of this is idolatry.

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However, what this person has overlooked, firstly, is that affirming the causal power of something other than God, whether material or otherwise, is self-evident and undeniable. God, in the Qur'an, has ascribed all manner of causal powers to beings other than Himself. Moreover, denying the causal efficacy of anything other than God completely undermines the universal law of cause and effect, which is the foundation of all the proofs for the existence and oneness of God—to deny the law of causality would, therefore, to be deny monotheism. Of course, one can deny that anything has causal power that is *independent* from God. However, to deny that anything other than God has any causal power whatsoever is to deny what is self-evidently real and known innately to all human beings.

On this basis, we can understand the meaning of God's words when He discuses the intercession of others with Him in the verse: *Those whom they invoke besides Him have no power of intercession, except those who are witness to the truth and who know* (43:86) and His in the verse: *He knows that which is before them and that which is behind them, and they do not intercede except for someone He approves of* ... (21:28).

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And what about those who turn to God and invoke Him in the name

of the Prophet and Imāms? God has said, *Certainly Our decree has gone beforehand in favor of Our servants, the messengers, that they will indeed receive divine help, and indeed Our hosts will be the victors* (37:171–173), and He has said, *Indeed We shall help Our messengers and those who have faith* ... (40:51).

As for those who venerate them and show their devotion to them by visiting their graves, kissing them, and treating their soil as blessed, this is because they are signs of God and His symbols, holding to His saying: *And whoever venerates the symbols of Allah—indeed that arises from the Godwariness of hearts* (22:32). This is in addition to the verse of kinship and other statements from the Qur'an and the Prophetic Sunna.

All of these are examples of seeking intercession with God through them. God has said,

In all of this, he seeks God's intercession through them. As God has said, *O you who have faith! Be wary of Allah, and seek the means of recourse to Him* (5:35). By this, the act of seeking recourse to God (*tawassul*) is made legitimate, and the Prophet and Imāms, by virtue of their love, respect, and reverence, are made a legitimate means of recourse to Him. The essence of the matter lies not in the negation of loving something or revering it, nor in the denial of that love or reverence having a real effect. Therefore, there is no problem with seeking closeness to God by loving them and venerating them, and whatever effects this may have, as long this takes the form of seeking intercession through them and not assigning them the power to act independently of God or to worship them outright.

Secondly, the one who makes the aforementioned argument fails to properly distinguish between worshipping someone other than God in the hopes that they will intercede on their behalf with God or bring them closer to Him, and worshipping God alone, while seeking intercession and nearness to Him through them. In the first case, they have assigned independent power to this other being and made it an object of worship aside from God Almighty. This is a form of idolatry, as it involves associating a partner with God in worship. However, in the latter case, this being is not given any causal power independent of God and God alone is the object of their worship, without having any partner.

God has condemned the polytheists for their saying, '*We only worship them so that they may bring us near to Allah*' (39:3) because they have

treated them as independent beings and made them objects of worship besides Him. If, on the other hand, they had said, 'We worship God alone and hope that His angels, messengers, or saints will intercede for us by His permission, or that we seek closeness to God by respecting His symbols and loving His allies,' they would not have been counted as disbelievers for doing so. This is because, had they said this, their partners would have served a similar function to the Ka'ba in Islam; it is a direction of worship rather than an object of worship. It is only God who is worshipped by turning to face it in prayer.

Moreover, I wonder what these people say about the Black Stone and what has been prescribed in Islam about touching and kissing it? And about the Ka'ba itself? Are all of these actions forms of idolatry that have been exempted from the prohibition? If so, the prohibition on idolatry is an undeniable rational judgement that does not accept special cases or admit exemptions, therefore any such exception would be invalid. On the other hand, if the devotion shown to the Black Stone is the purely monotheistic worship of God and the stone merely serves as a means and a direction, then what is the difference between this and other forms of seeking a means to God, if merely venerating it does not necessarily entail treating it as an entity that is independent of God and worthy of worship in its own right?

In addition to this, in order to deny the validity of such acts of intercession, one would have to deny the validity of the verses about venerating God's symbols and loving the Prophet and his Household.

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Verses 50-60

The verses recount the story of the prophet Hūd and his people, the ancient nation of ʿĀd. He was the first prophet to come after Noah that God mentions in the Qur'an, and His appreciation for Hūd's efforts to establish the call of truth and stand up against idolatry is clear to see. The mention of Noah's people is followed by that of Hūd's, as God has said in several places in the Qur'an: *The people of Noah, ʿĀd, and Thamūd* (e.g. 14:9).

وَإِلَىٰ عَادٍ أَخَاهُمْ هُودًا ۚ قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مَا لَكُمْ مِنْ إِلَٰهٍ غَيْرُهُ ۖ
إِنْ أَنْتُمْ إِلَّا مُفْتَرُونَ ﴿٥٠﴾

(11:50) *And to ʿĀd, their brother Hūd. He said, 'O my people! Worship Allah. You have no other god besides Him: you merely fabricate.'*

God describes Hūd as their brother because he was from them, and members of the same tribe are often called brothers due to their common ancestry. The sentence parallels God's previous statement: *Certainly We sent Noah to his people* (11:25). Therefore, the meaning intended here is: '*And to ʿĀd,* We sent *their brother Hūd*.' The omission of the verb may be what necessitated placing the phrase '*to ʿĀd*' before '*Hūd*.' God did not say, for example, 'And Hūd to ʿĀd' as he said 'Noah to his people', because in the former case there was a verb explicitly used to say that God sent Noah to his people, while in this case the use of the phrase '*to ʿĀd*', suggests the act of sending, and is therefore more apparent and clearer than the other way around.

He said, 'O my people! Worship Allah. You have no other god besides Him: you merely fabricate': This sentence sounds like the answer to a question posed by the audience when they heard the phrase, '*And to ʿĀd, their brother Hūd*', namely: 'And what did he say to them?' To which the response is *He said, 'O my people! Worship Allah...'*, which is why this is presented as a new statement, without a conjunction such as 'and' joining it to the previous phrase.

When Hūd says, '*Worship Allah*', this implies exclusivity, meaning: 'worship Him and do not worship the deities that you have taken up as lords besides God, whom you worship so that they may be intercessors for you with God, without you worshipping Him.' Further evidence of this exclusivity can be found in the statement immediately after: '*You have no other god besides Him: you merely fabricate*,' which suggests that they had taken up other deities to worship and made false claims about God by associating partners with Him and claiming they were intercessors.

يَا قَوْمِ لَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ أَجْرًا ۖ إِنْ أَجْرِيَ إِلَّا عَلَى الَّذِي فَطَرَنِي ۚ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٥١﴾

(11:51) *'O my people! I do not ask you any reward for it. My reward lies only with Him who originated me* (alladhī faṭaranī). *Do you not apply reason?'*

In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, al-Ṭabrisī writes: 'The word *faṭara* ("to originate") is means to split by God's command, just as leaves separate from trees. Creation is called *fiṭra* because it is like what has split from nothingness and come into being.' Al-Rāghib explains: 'The original meaning of *faṭara* is "to split lengthwise"... thus, God's creation is called *fiṭra* because it means to bring something into being and originate it in a way that causes its actions to come forth. The verse *, the origination* (fiṭra) *of Allah according to which He originated mankind* (30:30) is how God refers to the knowledge of Himself that He has created and placed in people. The *fiṭra* of God is the part of the human being He has empowered to apprehend the realities of faith, which is referred to by His saying: *If you ask them, "Who created them?" they will surely say, "Allah"* (43:87).

It appears that *fiṭra* refers to bringing something forth from utter nonexistence. The specificity understood from a phrase like *the origination* (fiṭra) *of Allah according to which He originated mankind* (30:30) arises from the pattern of the word '*fiṭra*', which is a causative form. On this basis, some interpret '*fiṭra*' as 'creation', but this is not quite correct. 'Creation' refers to the formation of a shape from matter by assembling parts. As God said, *and when you would create from clay the form of a bird* (5:110). Therefore, *fiṭra* refers to something more than this.

The purpose of Hūd's statement in the verse presently under discussion

is to dispel any suspicion that he might be acting in the pursuit of his own interests or aimlessly. The meaning is, 'O people, I do not ask for any reward for what I call you to, so that you won't accuse me of seeking personal benefit even if it ends up harming you. However, I am not calling to you without seeking any reward either, so this is not a senseless act. Rather, I am seeking a reward from God, who created me and originated me. Can't you understand from what I am saying to you that it becomes clear that I am giving you sincere advice you in my call? All I want is to lead you to the truth.'

وَيَا قَوْمِ اسْتَغْفِرُوا رَبَّكُمْ ثُمَّ تُوبُوا إِلَيْهِ يُرْسِلِ السَّمَاءَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِدْرَارًا
وَيَزِدْكُمْ قُوَّةً إِلَىٰ قُوَّتِكُمْ وَلَا تَتَوَلَّوْا مُجْرِمِينَ ﴿٥٢﴾

(11:52) *And, 'O my people! Plead with your Lord for forgiveness, then turn to Him penitently: He will send copious rains* (midrār) *for you from the sky* (samā'), *and add power to your power. So do not turn your backs as guilty ones.'*

The meaning of his statement, '*Plead with your Lord for forgiveness, then turn to Him penitently*' has been discussed in our commentary on the verse at the beginning of this chapter, *Plead with your Lord for forgiveness, then turn to Him penitently* (11:3).

As for the phrase, *He will send copious rains for you from the sky*, this is presented as a consequence for, *Please with your Lord for forgiveness.* In other words: 'If you plead with your Lord for forgiveness, then He will send copious rains for you from the sky.' The meaning of the term *samā'* ('sky') here is, in fact, the clouds, as *samā'* denotes something that overshadows another thing. Some have also said that *samā'* actually refers to the rains themselves, which is a common usage of the term. The term *midrār* is the emphatic form of *darr* ('to flow plentifully'), a verb that was originally used in connection with milk but came be used figuratively for rain and then anything of benefit or utility. So, sending the copious rains from the sky means sending clouds which continuously release beneficial rains that revive the earth, causes crops and grass to grow, and waters gardens and orchards.

'... *and add power to your power*' has been understood to mean to increase the strength of their faith in addition to the strength of their

bodies. Hūd's people were known for their physical prowess, and had they believed they would have enjoyed the might of faith in addition to the might of their bodies. Some have said that this '*power*' refers to physical strength, just as Noah said to his people: '*He will send for you abundant rains from the sky, and aid you with wealth and sons, and provide you with gardens and provide you with streams*' (71:12). However, perhaps a more generalized interpretation of this phrase is to be preferred.

'*So do not turn your backs as guilty ones*'—serves to explain the meaning of the command, '*Plead with your Lord for forgiveness, then turn to Him penitently*.' In other words: 'Worshipping these deities you have taken up besides God is a crime; an act of disobedience that will incur the divine wrath. Therefore, you must seek God's forgiveness for your wrongdoing and return to Him with faith, so that He may show mercy to you by sending abundant rain-filled clouds upon you and add strength to your strength.'

This verse indicates, first of all, that the people of Hūd had been afflicted by a drought and their lands had grown barren, which is suggested by His saying: '*He will send copious rains for you from the sky*' and also by their own words, which God recounts elsewhere: *When they saw it as a cloud advancing toward their valleys, they said, 'This cloud brings us rain.' 'Rather it is what you sought to hasten: a hurricane carrying a painful punishment ...'* (46:24).

Second, it indicates that there is a complete correlation between people's actions and the cosmic events which afflict them. Righteous deeds result in the multiplication of blessings and sending down of divine grace, while evil deeds invite successive calamities and disasters, bringing about anger, misery, and destruction, as indicated by the verse: *If the people of the towns had been faithful and Godwary, We would have opened to them blessings from the heaven and the earth* (7:96). A detailed discussion about this has already been presented in our commentary on verses 94–102 of Sūrah al-Aʿrāf.[1]

قَالُوا يَا هُودُ مَا جِئْتَنَا بِبَيِّنَةٍ وَمَا نَحْنُ بِتَارِكِي آلِهَتِنَا عَنْ قَوْلِكَ وَمَا نَحْنُ لَكَ بِمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٥٣﴾

1 See *al-Mīzān* Eng. vol. 16 (Ed.)

(11:53) *They said, 'O Hūd, you have not brought us any manifest proof. We are not going to abandon our gods for what you say, and we are not going to believe you.*

In the previous three verses, beginning with, *'O my people! Worship Allah. You have no other god besides Him...*, Hūd had implored his people for two things: To leave their gods and return to worshipping the One God alone, and to believe in him and follow what he advises them to do. They responded to him, in summary and in detail, in the manner recounted in this verse.

In summary, they said, '*you have not brought us any manifest proof*', meaning that your call is devoid of any argument or miraculous signs to support it, and therefore it will not convince us to heed what you advise.

In detail, they responded to his call to reject the partners they had set up besides God by saying, '*We are not going to abandon our gods for what you say*', and they responded to his call for them to believe and obey by saying, '*and we are not going to believe you*.' Therefore, they rejected him on both counts.

إِنْ نَقُولُ إِلَّا اعْتَرَاكَ بَعْضُ آلِهَتِنَا بِسُوءٍ ۗ قَالَ إِنِّي أُشْهِدُ اللَّهَ وَاشْهَدُوا أَنِّي
بَرِيءٌ مِمَّا تُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٥٤﴾ مِنْ دُونِهِ ۖ فَكِيدُونِي جَمِيعًا ثُمَّ لَا تُنْظِرُونِ ﴿٥٥﴾

(11:54-55) *All we say is that some of our gods have visited you with some evil.' He said, 'I call Allah to witness—and you too be witnesses—that I repudiate what you take as partners besides Him. Now try out your stratagems against me, together, without granting me any respite.'*

Then Hūd's people presented their own opinion to him, hoping to dishearten him and cause him to lose hope of ever winning them over, by saying: '*All we say is that some of our gods have visited you with some evil.*' In other words, they have harmed him with some adversity. They mean to say that they believe his condition is due to some of their gods cursing him with an affliction, such as madness, for insulting them and speaking ill of them. Hence, they believe he has lost his mind, so there is no need to pay attention to his call in any case.

How did Hūd respond? *He said, 'I call Allah to witness—and you too be*

witnesses—that I repudiate what you take as partners besides Him. Now try out your stratagems against me, together, without granting me any respite.' His answer was to announce his disavowal of the partners they had set up besides God and then challenging them to plot against him altogether and without delay.

When he said, '*I repudiate what you take as partners besides Him*', this is a speech act (*inshā'*) rather than a mere statement of fact (*ikhbār*), which is more appropriate for the context in which this takes place. Of course, this does not mean he was not innocent of such idolatry from the very beginning, as publicly proclaiming one's disassociation does not mean that one had not already enacted it previously. As for his statement, '*Now try out your stratagems against me, together, without granting me any respite*', this is a challenge that is intended to demonstrate their impotence against him and his message.

The prophet Hūd replied in this way to show his people that their gods cannot harm him, in spite of his public repudiation of them. If these deities actually possessed knowledge and power, they would have overpowered him and taken revenge against him for insulting them, just as his people claimed that some of their gods had afflicted him with a misfortune. The fact that nothing happened to him as a result of this repudiation is clear proof that these are not real gods and that they didn't afflict him with a misfortune as they claimed. The people would also see that they themselves are unable to harm him, despite their power and strength, which was unmatched by anyone else at their time. Had he not been a prophet from God, truthful in his words and protected by his Lord, they would have had the power to punish him or drive him away.

Therefore, the purpose of Hūd invoking both God and his people as witnesses in his disavowal becomes clear. He invokes God as a witness to make his repudiation of his peoples gods truthful and genuine, free of eye-service or hypocrisy. His calling his people to act as witnesses is to get their attention and make them see first-hand how their gods are incapable of either answering Hūd or taking revenge on him, and how they themselves are likewise incapable of punishing him.

This also demonstrates the correctness of the reading offered by some scholars, namely that this challenge serves as a miracle of the prophet Hūd. This is because it decisively refutes their claims by presenting a compelling

argument—particularly their claim that he has not brought them any manifest proof. It is highly unlikely that Hūd, as a prophet, would fail to respond to such a claim about his mission and preaching, especially when this challenge and demonstration of their inability can be taken as a miraculous sign and, therefore, a manifest proof in its own right. Similarly, his disavowal of partners other than God is a valid demonstration of the fact that they are not gods and that none of them have afflicted him with any misfortune.

Therefore, the truth is that when Hūd said, '*I call Allah to witness—and you too be witnesses …*', this is itself a logical argument against the divinity of the partners they had set up besides God and a miraculous sign for the truthfulness of Hūd's message.

When Hūd uses the word '*together*' in '*try out your stratagems against me, together*', this shows that it is his intent to confound them and all of their false gods and, thereby, to demonstrate beyond all doubt that he is on the right path and they are astray.

إِنِّي تَوَكَّلْتُ عَلَى اللَّهِ رَبِّي وَرَبِّكُمْ ۚ مَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ إِلَّا هُوَ آخِذٌ بِنَاصِيَتِهَا ۚ إِنَّ رَبِّي عَلَىٰ صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ ﴿٥٦﴾

(11:56) *'Indeed I have put my trust in Allah, my Lord and your Lord. There is no living being but He holds it by its forelock. Indeed my Lord is on a straight path.'*

When someone issues a challenge to their opponent, it is in order to demonstrate the latter's incompetence and impotence. Therefore, it makes sense that such a challenge should be issued by someone who is not afraid of their opponent. Even if the opponent is capable of doing what he has been challenged to do, he is not capable of intimidating him or forcing him to accede to his demands. As the sorcerers said to Pharaoh: *Decide whatever you may. You can only decide about the life of this world* (20:72).

Hūd's statement, '*Now try out your stratagems against me, together, without granting me any respite*' could be read as meaning that he does not fear them, no matter what they might do. However, he excludes this possibility when he follows up with the statement, '*Indeed I have put my trust in Allah, my Lord and your Lord*.' This shows that he relies on God in all of his affairs, and God is the one who governs not only his affairs but

theirs as well. Then he follows this by saying, '*There is no living being but He holds it by its forelock. Indeed my Lord is on a straight path.*' Here, he shows that he is indeed saved through his reliance on God because God encompasses them all, overpowers them, and judges according to a single law, which is to support the truth and make it prevail it over falsehood whenever the two confront one another.

Therefore, the fact that Hūd has publicly repudiated their idols and issued the challenge, '*Now try out your stratagems against me, together, without granting me any respite*', and then continued to live amongst them, safe and secure, unharmed and beyond their ability to harm, constitutes a miraculous sign and a manifest proof that he is God's messenger to them.

In Hūd's statement, '*There is no living being but He holds it by its forelock. Indeed my Lord is on a straight path*', the phrase '*living being*' refers to all the creatures that move across the earth among the various species of animals. To hold something by its forelock means to exercise supreme authority and absolute control over it. God being upon the straight path symbolizes the unchanging and timeless cosmic order that He has instituted in His creation and the fact that He governs its affairs based on justice and wisdom. As a result, He causes the truth to prevail and falsehood to vanish whenever they come into conflict.

Therefore, the meaning of Hūd's words here are: 'I have placed my trust in God, my Lord and your Lord, for the success of my argument against you—the argument that shows I have disavowed your idols and that neither you or your idols can harm me in the least. This is because God is the Sovereign who has complete authority over me and you, as well as over all the creatures that inhabit the world. His law is just, constant, and unchanging, so He will uphold His religion and protect me from your evil.'

Note that he did not say, 'Indeed my Lord and your Lord are on a straight path' in the same manner as he said, '*Indeed I have put my trust in Allah, my Lord and your Lord*.' This is because he utters these words in the context of praying for himself against his people, expecting that God will protect him from their harm. Therefore, he takes God as his Lord alone, and not the Lord of his people. After all, it is more fitting for him to invoke God as his Lord and to hold fast to the bond of servitude between him and his Lord so that his supplication will be granted. This contrasts with his saying, '*Indeed I have put my trust in Allah, my Lord and your Lord*',

in which he intends to highlight the universality of God's sovereignty and the fact that He encompasses all.

فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَقَدْ أَبْلَغْتُكُمْ مَا أُرْسِلْتُ بِهِ إِلَيْكُمْ ۚ وَيَسْتَخْلِفُ رَبِّي قَوْمًا غَيْرَكُمْ وَلَا تَضُرُّونَهُ شَيْئًا ۚ إِنَّ رَبِّي عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ حَفِيظٌ ﴿٥٧﴾

(11:57) *'But if you turn your backs, then I have communicated to you whatever I was sent to you with. My Lord will make another people succeed you, and you will not hurt Allah in the least. Indeed my Lord is watchful over all things.'*

This part of Hūd's speech concerns his people's claim, '*All we say is that some of our gods have visited you with some evil*,' which indicates that they are determined not to believe in him and persist in their obstinate denial of the truth. In other words: 'If you turn away and refuse to believe in me or heed my commands, know that I have conveyed my Lord's message to you, the argument has been completed against you, and tribulation has become your due.'

'My Lord will make another people succeed you, and you will not hurt Allah in the least. Indeed my Lord is watchful over all things': This is both a warning and a statement of fact about the natural consequences that will follow from their wrongdoing. For he had promised them that if they asked God for forgiveness and turned to Him penitently, He would send abundant rain clouds upon them and added strength to their strength, and he forbade them from turning away and remaining guilty, as this would lead to a severe punishment.

When Hūd says, '*My Lord will make another people succeed you ...*', this means that God will make another people successors on the earth in their place, as the human being is a successor from God upon the earth, as per the verse in which God told the angels, *'Indeed I am going to set a successor on the earth'* (2:30). And Hūd had already made clear to them that God had made them successors on the earth after Noah's people, as we read in the verse: *Remember when He made you successors after the people of Noah, and increased you vastly in creation* (7:69).

It is clear from the context that this declarative sentence is connected to another implied one. The implicit meaning is: 'My Lord will dispose of you and replace you with another people...' as He says, . *If He wishes,*

He will take you away, and make whomever He wishes succeed you (6:133).

As for the statement, '*and you will not hurt Allah in the least*', the context suggests that this follows on from the preceding statement. In other words: 'You are not capable of inflicting any kind of harm on Him, whether in the form of depriving Him of something or some other way. If He wishes to destroy you, you cannot prevent Him from doing so, nor does your punishment and destruction entail any loss for Him. For indeed, my Lord is watchful over all things. Nothing is absent from His knowledge, nor is anything beyond His power.' There are other inaccurate readings that scholars have suggested for this verse, and we have omitted them for the sake of conciseness.

وَلَمَّا جَاءَ أَمْرُنَا نَجَّيْنَا هُودًا وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَعَهُ بِرَحْمَةٍ مِنَّا وَنَجَّيْنَاهُمْ مِنْ عَذَابٍ غَلِيظٍ ﴿٥٨﴾

(11:58) ***And when Our edict came, We delivered Hūd and the faithful who were with him, by a mercy from Us, and We delivered them from a harsh punishment.***

The phrase, *And when Our edict came*, refers to when the punishment descended or, more specifically, when the divine command was issued for a decisive judgement to be made between the messenger and his people. As God has said elsewhere: *A messenger may not bring any sign except by Allah's permission. Hence when Allah's edict comes, judgement is made with justice, and it is thence that the falsifiers become losers* (40:78).

When God says, *by a mercy from Us*, this is an apparent reference to the special mercy that is reserved for the faithful, which necessitates divine support for their religion and saving them from God's wrath and the divine punishment of extermination. As God has said, *Indeed We shall help Our messengers and those who have faith in the life of the world and on the day when the witnesses rise up* (40:51).

... and We delivered them from a harsh punishment: The context indicates that this refers to the punishment that enveloped the disbelievers of Hūd's people, so this serves as an explanatory phrase for the sentence before it. Some scholars have suggested it refers to the punishment of the Hereafter, but such a reading has no basis in the text.

وَتِلْكَ عَادٌ ۖ جَحَدُوا بِآيَاتِ رَبِّهِمْ وَعَصَوْا رُسُلَهُ وَاتَّبَعُوا أَمْرَ كُلِّ جَبَّارٍ عَنِيدٍ ﴿٥٩﴾ وَأُتْبِعُوا فِي هَٰذِهِ الدُّنْيَا لَعْنَةً وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ ۗ أَلَا إِنَّ عَادًا كَفَرُوا رَبَّهُمْ ۗ أَلَا بُعْدًا لِعَادٍ قَوْمِ هُودٍ ﴿٦٠﴾

(11:59-60) *Such were ʿĀd: they impugned the signs of their Lord and disobeyed His messengers and followed the dictates of every obdurate tyrant* (jabbār ʿanīd). *So they were pursued by a curse in this world and on the Day of Resurrection. Look! Indeed ʿĀd defied their Lord. Look! Away with ʿĀd, the people of Hūd!*

These two verses twice summarize the story of ʿĀd.

The first summary is: *Such were ʿĀd... and on the Day of Resurrection* (11:59–60). This recalls that they denied the signs of their Lord, which came to them in the form of wisdom, admonition, and miracles and showed them the path of righteousness and clearly distinguished truth from falsehood for them. So, they denied God's signs despite the knowledge they had received and disobeyed the messengers of their Lord, including Hūd and those before him. This is because to deny a single messenger is tantamount to denying all of them, for all of the prophets called humankind to follow the same religion. Therefore, even if they only defied Hūd directly, by disobeying him they had defied all of the messengers of God. This is also apparent from another verse of the Qur'an: *'Ād impugned the messengers, when Hūd, their brother, said to them, 'Will you not be Godwary?'* (26:123–124). This is also hinted at by the verse, *And mention the brother of ʿĀd, when he warned his people at Ahqaf—and warners have passed away before and after him ...* (46:21). It is possible that other messengers were sent to them between Hūd and Noah who were not mentioned in the Qur'an, but the context of the verses under discussion does not support this.

The verse also states that the people of ʿĀd followed every powerful and obstinate tyrant amongst them, which explains why they turned away from following Hūd and his teachings. This is because a *jabbār* ('tyrant') is a person who subjugates others to his will, forcing them to do what he wants, while one who is obstinate (*ʿanīd*) refuses to accept the truth. This summarizes their condition: they denied the signs, disobeyed the messengers, and obeyed tyrants.

Then, God mentions the consequences of their deeds: *So they were*

pursued by a curse in this world and on the Day of Resurrection. This means God cursed them in this world and cast them away from His mercy. The proof of the existence of this curse is the punishment that pursued them. This could also refer to the sins and misdeeds that are recorded against their names for as long as the world lasts, as they set a precedent of idolatry and disbelief for those generations who came after them. As God says: *Indeed it is We who revive the dead and write what they have sent ahead and their effects* (36:12).

Some interpret this verse to mean they were cursed in this world, such that everyone who heard their story afterwards, those who saw their ruins, and every messenger who reached them, cursed them. The curse on the Day of Resurrection is proven by the eternal punishment they will endure then, as the Day of Resurrection is the Day of Recompense.

Note the subtle eloquence in the fact that God describes them as 'following' tyrants and then that says that they were 'pursued' by a curse.

Look! Indeed ʿĀd defied their Lord. Look! Away with ʿĀd, the people of Hūd!—meaning, 'they disbelieved in their Lord.' This is the second of the two summaries that we identified above. In fact, it is almost like an encapsulation of the first summary. The phrase, *Look! Indeed ʿĀd* ... parallels the description *Such were ʿĀd: they impugned* ..., while *Look! Away with ʿĀd* ... parallels *So they were pursued by a curse in this world* ...

This sentence suggests that the curse mentioned earlier refers to a divine curse rather than a human one, and that of the various interpretations mentioned above, the second is most appropriate, not the third.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, it is narrated from Abū ʿAmr al-Saʿadī: ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib said about the verse, *Indeed my Lord is on a straight path* (11:56): 'It means that He is in the right. He will requite with good, evil with evil, and He pardons and forgives whom He wills, glory be to Him, the Exalted.'

Author's comment: This explanation has been mentioned previously, and it has been narrated from the Prophet's Household that the land of ʿĀd was in the desert, and that they had many crops and date palms. They lived long lives and tall strong bodies, but they worshipped idols. God sent Hūd to them, who invited them to submit to God and to renounce

idolatry. But they refused and did not believe Hūd, and they persecuted him. Therefore, the sky withheld its rain from them for seven years until they suffered a famine.

The withholding of the rain from them is also reported in a Sunni tradition on the authority of al-Ḍaḥḥāk, who said: 'Rain was withheld from 'Ād for three years. Then Hūd said to them, '*O my people! Plead with your Lord for forgiveness, then turn to Him penitently: He will send copious rains for you from the sky …*' (11:52). But they stubbornly refused to change their ways.' It has been previously noted that the verses do contain indications of this.

The reader should know that there are very many narrations about the story of Hūd and 'Ād are plentiful, but they often contain details that cannot be validated by the Qur'an or confirmed by rational inquiry, which is why we have glossed over them.

There are also other reports from Shi'a and Sunni sources describing the gardens of 'Ād, which is attributed to King Shaddād. This garden is mentioned in the verse, *Iram, of the pillars, the like of which was not created among cities* (89:7–8). We will discuss this further in our commentary on Sūrah al-Fajr.

On the Story of Hūd

'Ād, the people of Hūd

These were prehistoric Arabs who lived in the Arabian Peninsula. Their history has been lost and all trace of them has been erased from the land. History only preserves anecdotes about their lives, which are unreliable, and there is no mention of them in the existing Torah.

According to the Qur'an, 'Ād—possibly referred to as 'the first 'Ād' (53:50), suggesting there was a second one—were a people living in a place called al-*Aḥqāf*[1] in the Arabian Peninsula (53:21) after the people of Noah (7:69). These people were of tall stature (54:20, 69:7) who had spread widely across creation (7:69) and were endowed with great power and

1 Al-Aḥqāf (plural of *Ḥaqf*) refers to sand dunes. The Aḥqāf mentioned in the Qur'an is a valley between Oman and the land of Mihrī in Western Yemen. Some say it extends from Oman to Hadramaut, overlooking the sea near the town of al-Shihr. Al-Ḍaḥḥāk said: Al-Aḥqāf is a mountain in Syria (Reference: *Al-Marāṣid*).

violence (41:15, 26:130). They were advanced and civilised, with populous lands and fertile territories full of orchards, date palm, crops, and of a noble bearing (see 26:130 and others). A testament to their civilizational achievements is God's description of them: *Iram, of the pillars, the like of which was not created among cities* (89:7–8)

The people of ʿĀd enjoyed God's blessings until they changed their inner condition by turning to the worship of idols. They raised graven images in every corner, built strongholds for themselves in the hopes that they could live forever, while obeying the arrogant tyrants amongst them. So, God sent their brother Hūd to call them back to the truth, to guide them to worship the One God and reject their false idols, and to act justly and mercifully with one another (26:130). He advised them unfailingly, spreading his teachings among them, illuminating the right path and showing them the way of truth. In spite of tis, however, they responded to him with obstinacy and denial, confronting him with rejection and disbelief. Only a few among them believed, while the majority persisted stubbornly in their wrongdoing and idolatry. They accused Hūd of being either foolish or mad, and they repeatedly challenged him to call down the punishment about which he had warned them. He responded: *'The knowledge is with Allah alone. I communicate to you what I have been sent with. But I see that you are a senseless lot* (46:23).

So, God brought down His punishment upon them and sent a barren wind that caused everything it touched to disintegrate into dust (51:42). It was a howling wind, blowing on 'ill-fated days' for seven nights and eight days in succession. You would see people laid low during it, as if they were the hollowed-out trunks of palm trees (69:7), and it uprooted people as if they were trunks of upturned palm trees (54:20).

When they first sighted God's punishment as a cloud approaching their valleys, they felt hopeful and said: '*This cloud brings us rain!*' But they were mistaken. Instead, it was what they sought to hasten: *a hurricane carrying a painful punishment destroying everything by its Lord's command. So they became such that nothing could be seen except their dwellings* (46: 25). Thus, God destroyed them utterly and saved Hūd and those who believed along with him by His mercy (11:58).

The moral character of Hūd

As for Hūd he was from the people of ʿĀd and the second of the prophets who stood up to defend the truth and refute idolatry. His story and the hardships and harm he endured for the sake of God are mentioned by God Himself in the Qur'an. He was also praised by God as one of His noble messengers, and he shared in their commendation. May God's peace be upon him.

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Verses 61–68

This series of verses discusses the story of the prophet Ṣāliḥ and his people, Thamūd. He was the third of the prophets sent by God to preach monotheism and stand up against idolatry. He called the people of Thamūd to believe in One God and endured hardship and adversity for His sake, until God judged between him and them and sentenced them to destruction, while saving Ṣāliḥ and the believers who were with him.

وَإِلَىٰ ثَمُودَ أَخَاهُمْ صَالِحًا ۚ قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مَا لَكُمْ مِنْ إِلَٰهٍ غَيْرُهُ ۖ هُوَ أَنْشَأَكُمْ مِنَ الْأَرْضِ وَاسْتَعْمَرَكُمْ فِيهَا فَاسْتَغْفِرُوهُ ثُمَّ تُوبُوا إِلَيْهِ ۚ إِنَّ رَبِّي قَرِيبٌ مُجِيبٌ ﴿٦١﴾

(11:61) *And to Thamūd, their brother Ṣāliḥ. He said, 'O my people! Worship Allah. You have no other god besides Him. He brought you forth from the earth and made it your habitation. So plead with Him for forgiveness, then turn to Him penitently. My Lord is indeed nearmost responsive.'*

We have already discussed the style of this verse's beginning in our commentary on the story of Hūd, above (*And to ʿĀd, their brother Hūd*—11:50).

Ṣāliḥ tells his people, '*He brought you forth* (ansha'akum) *from the earth and made it your habitation* (istaʿmara-kum fī-hā).' Al-Rāghib says: 'The verb *inshā'* means to bring something into being and to nurture it, and it is mostly used in relation to living creatures. See, for example the verse: *It is He who created you* (ansha'a-kum)*, and made for you hearing, eyesight* ... (67:23).' He also says: '*ʿImāra* ('building, habitation', from whence the verb *istaʿmara* is derived) is the opposite of *kharāb* ('ruin'). One might say *ʿammara arḍa-hu* ('he built on his land'). To see the nuances of this word's meaning, consider the verses: ... *the maintenance* (ʿimāra) *of the Holy Mosque* ...(9:19); ... *they ploughed the earth and developed it more than they have developed it* (ʿamarū-hā akthar mimmā ʿamarū-hā) ... (30:9); ... *by the House erected* (al-bayt al-maʿmūr) ... (52:4); and ... *made it your habitation* (istaʿmara-kum fī-hā) (11:61).' Therefore, *ʿimāra* means to transform the

land into a state in which its expected benefits can be reaped, like developing a house for living, a mosque for worship, a field for cultivation, an orchard for harvesting its fruits and relaxing in, and *istiʿmār* denotes the pursuit of making the earth habitable and beneficial for human beings.

Based on the above, the meaning of His saying, '*He brought you forth from the earth and made it your habitation*'—which is phrased in such a way as to imply exclusivity—is: 'God is the One who created these entities known as a humans from earthly matter and then completed their development gradually. He instilled in them the instinct to work the earth and transform it into a state that benefits them in their lives and, through this, they can satisfy their needs and overcome their deficiencies. In other words, you need nothing for your existence and survival except for God Almighty.'

Therefore, when Ṣāliḥ says, '*He brought you forth from the earth and made it your habitation*', this is an argument to support the message he delivered to them when he said, *'O my people! Worship Allah. You have no other god besides Him* ...' In fact, this sentence is presented as if in response to a question, namely: 'Why should we worship Him alone?' To which he answered: 'Because *He brought you forth from the earth and made it your habitation*.'

This is because they used to worship idols and raise them up as partners besides God, thinking—wrongly—that God was too exalted to be comprehended by them, too high to be reached by their worship or to respond to their prayers and supplications. They believed that humans needed mediators to reach God, so they worshipped some of His noble creations, who they believed God had entrusted with the affairs of this earthly world and the systems within it. They sought to propitiate these mediators in order that they might gain their favor and avoid their wrath, thus securing blessings and warding off harm. They believed that these divine intermediaries were their intercessors with God, as he was the God of Gods and Lord of Lords, to whom all matters ultimately return.

As we have already discussed, idolatry is founded on severing the relationship between God and humans, and establishing it between humans and these noble intermediaries, to whom they turn with their needs and requests. These intermediaries are seen as independent from God in their power, and as intercessors with Him on behalf of human beings.

However, since God is the One who created humans from the earth

and settled them in it, He has a close relationship with humans. There is no independence for any of the causes and processes that He has created and set in motion in this world, from which we hope to obtain good by pleasing them or fear being harmed by if we anger them.

Therefore, it is God alone who should be worshipped and, by doing so, His pleasure is sought and His wrath is avoided. This is because He is the creator of man and everything else that exists and the one who manages all the affairs of the world. When He says, "*. He brought you forth from the earth and made it your habitation*, this leads the audience to deduce that there is, in fact, a relationship between God and human beings, and that there is no agents or causes in existence that are independent of him.

This is why Ṣāliḥ says immediately after this, '*So plead with Him for forgiveness, then turn to Him penitently. My Lord is indeed nearmost and responsive.*' This is the conclusion he draws from the previous statement. In other words: 'If God is the one you must worship and abandon all others because He is your Creator and the one who manages your life's affairs, then you must ask Him to forgive you for the sin of worshipping others besides Him and return to Him with faith in Him and worship. He is close and responsive.'

Note that when he says, '*My Lord is nearmost and responsive*', he is providing a rationale for why they should turn to God. This is because he has already demonstrated that God is the one who creates man, nurtures him, and manages his life affairs, and that none of the causes that operate in the universe are independent of Him. Rather, it is God Almighty who directs the entirety of the cosmic order. He is the one who stands between man and his needs and all of the worldly causes that play a role therein. Contrary to the claim of the idolaters that God is beyond their comprehension and cannot be reached by worship and offerings, God is, in fact, close to the human being. And if He is close, He is responsive. And if He is close and responsive and He is God and there is no god besides Him, then it is obligatory to seek His forgiveness and repent to Him.

قَالُوا يَا صَالِحُ قَدْ كُنْتَ فِينَا مَرْجُوًّا قَبْلَ هَٰذَا ۖ أَتَنْهَانَا أَنْ نَعْبُدَ مَا يَعْبُدُ
آبَاؤُنَا وَإِنَّنَا لَفِي شَكٍّ مِمَّا تَدْعُونَا إِلَيْهِ مُرِيبٍ ﴿٦٢﴾

(11:62) *They said, 'O Ṣāliḥ! You were a source of hope to us* (qad

kunta fī-nā marjuwwan) *before this. Do you forbid us to worship what our fathers have been worshipping? Indeed we have grave doubts concerning that to which you invite us.'*

When one has hope in a person, it is never in terms of his being but in terms of his actions and achievements, and one does not hope for anything other than something good or beneficial coming from them. Therefore, when Ṣāliḥ's people say that he was a source of hope for them, this means that they expected him to be a person of wisdom and excellence, both in himself and in his household, and that goodness and benefit would flow from him to them. The fact that they say *qad kunta fī-nā* ('you were ... to us') shows that he was a source of hope to the majority of them.

Therefore, when they say, *'O Ṣāliḥ! You were a source of hope to us before this*', it means that the people of Thamūd had hoped that Ṣāliḥ would be an upstanding member of their community, who would benefit them through his dedication and service, and lead them along the path of progress and success, precisely because they saw the signs of wisdom and excellence in him. However, when he began preaching his message of monotheism, this dashed their hopes and diminished their opinion of him, because they believed he was attempting to change their communal way of life with new-fangled ideas of his own devising.

This is reflected in their complaint, '*Do you forbid us to worship what our fathers worship?*', which is a rhetorical question conveying the meaning of rebuke and disapproval. In fact, this complaint explains why they lost hope in him: Because he forbade them from following the tradition of their forefathers and sought to erase one of the most visible aspects of their identity. Worshipping idols was a sacred tradition within their society, and they believed that the preservation of such sacred traditions in a society was a sign that this society has a proud heritage, a unified identity, and integrity in its values and opinions.

The evidence for what this can be found in the complaint: '*Do you forbid us to worship what our fathers worship?*' Notice that they did not say: 'Do you forbid us from worshipping what our fathers worshipped?' Instead, they used the present tense '*...what our fathers worship?*' The difference in meaning between these two expressions is clear, as by using the present-tense verb '*worship*', the question itself links their worship to that of their ancestors and shows that this worship is continuous and uninterrupted

from one generation to the next.

From this point, it is apparent that the explanation put forward by some scholars, such as Rāshid Riḍā in *al-Manār* and others, to the effect that the statement, '*Do you forbid us to worship what our fathers worship?*' is equivalent in meaning to '...what our fathers used to worship?', is erroneous.

'Indeed we have grave doubts (inna-nā la-fī shakkun ... murīb) concerning that to which you invite us': This is their second reason for rejecting Ṣāliḥ's message. Their first reason was that the renunciation of idol worship represented an abhorrent innovation that would have destroyed the sacred traditions of Thamūd, undermined the harmony of their society, and destroyed their heritage. Therefore, they said they had no choice but to reject it. The second reason they give for rejecting Ṣāliḥ's message is that he has not presented any conclusive evidence that would dispel their doubts and convinced them of his truthfulness. Therefore, they say that they are in grave doubt about what he invites them to—the implication being that they should not accept his teachings if they harbour doubts about them.

Irāba (from whence the active participle *murīb* is derived) means to harbour suspicions about a person. One might say, 'Such-and-such causes me to suspect him' (*rāba-nī min-hu kadhā*) if the person has given the speaker grounds to suspect or mistrust him.

قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُ عَلَىٰ بَيِّنَةٍ مِنْ رَبِّي وَآتَانِي مِنْهُ رَحْمَةً فَمَنْ يَنْصُرُنِي مِنَ اللَّهِ إِنْ عَصَيْتُهُ ۖ فَمَا تَزِيدُونَنِي غَيْرَ تَخْسِيرٍ ﴿٦٣﴾

(11:63) ***He said, 'O my people! Tell me, should I stand on a manifest proof*** (bayyina) ***from my Lord, and He has granted me His own mercy*** (raḥma)***, who will protect me from Allah should I disobey Him? For then you will increase me in nothing but loss.***

The meaning of *bayyina* ('manifest proof') here is a miracle, while *raḥma* ('mercy') refers to the station of prophethood. We have already discussed a similar verse in our commentary on the story of Noah, earlier in the chapter (see 11:28).

Therefore, when Ṣāliḥ says, '*who will protect me from Allah should I disobey Him?*' This is a conditional statement, which gives the general meaning: 'Tell me, if I am supported by a miraculous sign that demonstrates

the truth of my call, and if God has bestowed upon me a divine message and commanded me to convey it, then who could save me from God and fend off His punishment if I obey your instructions and acquiesce to your demands, namely to abandon my mission?' Thus, the statement provides a response to both their arguments and a defence against their accusations that his message was something of his own devising.

When Ṣāliḥ says, '*For then you will increase me in nothing but loss*', this is the conclusion he draws from his previous statement, in which he refuted their two arguments (that his call was something of his own devising and that he had not brought them any conclusive proof for his claims) and defended his decision to preach a message that was contrary to their communal traditions. Therefore, the meaning of this statement is: 'You are not encouraging to abandon my mission, return the fold, and re-join your faith, except to cause me loss. For anything contrary to the truth can only be a loss.'

Another reading of this is: 'Your statement, '*Do you forbid us to worship what our fathers worship?*' does nothing but confirm in my mind that you are in state of loss.' Yet another reading is: 'You do nothing except increase my insight into your loss.' However, the first interpretation is the most probable.

وَيَا قَوْمِ هَٰذِهِ نَاقَةُ اللَّهِ لَكُمْ آيَةً فَذَرُوهَا تَأْكُلْ فِي أَرْضِ اللَّهِ وَلَا تَمَسُّوهَا بِسُوءٍ فَيَأْخُذَكُمْ عَذَابٌ قَرِيبٌ ﴿٦٤﴾

(11:64) *O my people! This she-camel of Allah is a sign for you. Let her graze freely in Allah's land, and do not cause her any harm, for then you shall be seized by a prompt punishment.'*

The fact that the verse attributes the she-camel to God is an honorific attribution, similar to 'the House of God' and 'the Book of God.' The she-camel was a miraculous sign given to Ṣāliḥ to support his claim of prophethood. He brought it forth from the rock of the mountain by God's permission and told them that she had to be allowed to graze freely in God's land and warned them against causing her any harm, meaning, to hurt her by striking, wounding, or killing her. Then he informed them that if they did harm her, a rapid and imminent punishment would seize them. This is the meaning of the verse.

فَعَقَرُوهَا فَقَالَ تَمَتَّعُوا فِي دَارِكُمْ ثَلَاثَةَ أَيَّامٍ ۖ ذَٰلِكَ وَعْدٌ غَيْرُ مَكْذُوبٍ ﴿٦٥﴾

(11:65) *But they hamstrung her, whereupon he said, 'Enjoy yourselves in your abode* (dār) *for three days: that is a promise not to be belied!'*

Hamstringing the she-camel means that they slaughtered her. A *dār* is a place that a person builds and lives in, where they and their family find shelter. The 'abode' referred to in the verse is the city in which they lived. The verse calls it an 'abode' because its people were gathered within it just as a family gather in their abode. Some have suggested that the word 'abode', refers to the abode of this world. However, this is an unlikely meaning, given the context.

When Ṣāliḥ tells them to enjoy themselves in their abode, this means that they should go on living their lives and indulging in whatever they like, because the life of this world is a brief enjoyment. Or he might mean that they should enjoy whatever blessings they have amassed in it, such as pleasing appearances, furnishings, food, drink, and indulge in their base desires.

When he says, '*that is a promise not to be belied!*', the demonstrative pronoun 'that' refers to '*Enjoy yourselves in your abode for three days*', and the phrase is a clarification of what he means by this.

فَلَمَّا جَاءَ أَمْرُنَا نَجَّيْنَا صَالِحًا وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَعَهُ بِرَحْمَةٍ مِنَّا وَمِنْ خِزْيِ يَوْمِئِذٍ ۗ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ الْقَوِيُّ الْعَزِيزُ ﴿٦٦﴾

(11:66) *So when Our edict came, We delivered Ṣāliḥ and the faithful who were with him by a mercy from Us, and from the disgrace of that day. Your Lord is indeed the All-strong, the All-mighty.*

We have already discussed the meaning of the passage, *when Our edict came, We delivered Ṣāliḥ and the faithful who were with him by a mercy from Us*, in our commentary on a similar verse that occurs in the story of Hūd in this chapter (see 11:58).

The phrase, *and from the disgrace of that day*, should be understood as being paired with an implicit object, with the intended meaning being: 'We saved them from the punishment and *from the disgrace of that day*.' Here, 'disgrace' refers to the shameful event that exposes one's disgrace,

leading to feelings of embarrassment or dishonor. Alternatively, it could mean 'We saved them from the people and *from the disgrace of that day*', in a similar vein to the verse, ... *and deliver me from the wrongdoing lot* (66:11).

Your Lord is indeed the All-strong, the All-mighty provides a rationale for the earlier part of the verse. It also represents a shift in speech from speaking in the third person to direct address. A similar verse appears at the end of the story of Hūd, *Indeed 'Ād defied their Lord ...*, in that both of these verses highlight the divine attribute of Lordship, indicating that they had forsaken the mantle divine servanthood that had been placed upon them and, in doing so, denied God's lordship and shown ingratitude for the blessings of their Lord.

وَأَخَذَ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا الصَّيْحَةُ فَأَصْبَحُوا فِي دِيَارِهِمْ جَاثِمِينَ ﴿٦٧﴾

(11:67) *The Cry seized those who were wrongdoers, and they lay lifeless prostrate* (jāthimīn) *in their homes*

Jāthimīn ('prostrate') means that they had fallen on their faces. The remainder of the verse's meaning is clear.

كَأَنْ لَمْ يَغْنَوْا فِيهَا ۗ أَلَا إِنَّ ثَمُودَ كَفَرُوا رَبَّهُمْ ۗ أَلَا بُعْدًا لِثَمُودَ ﴿٦٨﴾

(11:68) *as if they had never lived therein* (ka-an lam yaghnaw fī-hā). *Look! Indeed Thamūd defied their Lord. Look! Away with Thamūd!*

The verb *yaghnaw*, when used in relation to a place, means to dwell there. And the pronoun 'therein' (*fī-hā*) refers to *their homes* in the previous verse.

Look! Indeed Thamūd defied their Lord. Look! Away with Thamūd!: As with the story of 'Ād and the prophet Hūd, this verse summarizes the narrative that precedes it. The first sentence summarizes the state of Thamūd and the prophetic mission of Ṣāliḥ, while the second summarizes the recompense they received from God.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *al-Kāfī*, it is reported from Abū Baṣīr who narrates from Imām al-Ṣādiq: 'I asked him about the verse: *Thamūd denied the*

warnings, and they said, 'Are we to follow a lone human from ourselves?! Indeed then we would be in error and madness' (54:23–24).
He said: "This refers to their rejection of the prophet Ṣāliḥ. God never destroys a people without first sending messengers to warn them.
So, God sent Ṣāliḥ to them. They did not respond to his preaching and instead became obstinate. They said, 'We will not believe you until you cause a pregnant she-camel to come out of this rock.' This is because they worshipped and venerated the rock, sacrificing to it each year and gathering around it. They said, 'If you are truly a prophet as you claim, then call upon your God to cause a pregnant she-camel to emerge from this solid rock.' So, God made the she-camel appear as they had asked.
Then God revealed to Ṣāliḥ: 'Tell them: God has assigned a drinking day for this she-camel and a drinking day for you.' So on the she-camel's drinking day, she would drink all the water and they would all stay back from it, both young and old, and then drink her milk on their day instead. At night, they would go to their water and drink from it on their day, and the she-camel would not drink that day. They continued in this fashion for as long as God willed.
Then they became defiant towards God. One of them said to the others, 'We should Hamstring this she-camel and be done with her. We cannot accept having a drinking day for us and a drinking day for her.' Then they said, 'Who will kill her? We will reward him handsomely.' A man came forward, a red-skinned, blonde-haired, blue-eyed man of illegitimate birth known as Qidār—one of the most wretched among them—and they promised him a reward should he accomplish this task.
So, when the she-camel went to the water that she would drink, she drank her fill and was returning to graze when Qidār ambushed her on her path. He struck her with his sword, but it did no damage. Then he struck her again and killed her, and she fell dead on her side. Her offspring fled to the mountain and cried out to the sky three times. The people of Ṣāliḥ stood and allowed this to happen, so each one of them shared in the guilt of her killing.

They divided her meat among themselves, and not a single one of them, young or old, abstained from eating it.

When Ṣāliḥ saw this, he said to them, 'What has driven you to do this? Have you disobeyed the command of your Lord?' Then God revealed to Ṣāliḥ: 'Your people have transgressed and acted wickedly. They killed the she-camel, whom God sent as a proof to them. She caused them no harm, but she was of great benefit to them. Tell them that I will send my punishment in three days. If they repent and return to the right path, I will accept their repentance and avert the punishment. If they do not repent and return, I will send my punishment on the third day.'

Ṣāliḥ went to them and said, 'I am a messenger of your Lord. He says: If you repent, return and seek forgiveness, He will forgive you and accept your repentance.' But when he said this, they responded with the most stubborn and vile words. They said, 'O Ṣāliḥ, bring us what you promise us if you are truthful!'

He said, 'O people, tomorrow morning your faces will turn yellow, the next day red, and on the third day black.' And indeed, on the first day, their faces turned yellow. Some of them went to one another and said, 'What Ṣāliḥ forewarned has come to pass.' However, the obstinate amongst them retorted, 'We will not listen to Ṣāliḥ's words nor accept them, no matter how momentous they seem.'

On the second day, their faces turned red. Again, some of them reminded each other, 'What Ṣāliḥ forewarned has come to pass.' Yet, the obstinate ones among them persisted, 'Even if we were all to perish, we would not heed Ṣāliḥ's words. We will not abandon the gods our ancestors worshipped.' They did not repent or turn back.

On the third day, their faces turned black. Once more, some of them approached each other, saying, 'What Ṣāliḥ foretold has surely come.' This time, even the obstinate ones had to admit, 'What Ṣāliḥ foretold to us has indeed happened.'

At midnight, the Angel Gabriel came to them. He issued a scream that shattered their eardrums, split their hearts, and ruptured their livers. In those three days, they had shrouded themselves for

burial, for they knew all too well that punishment was about to descend. In a blink of an eye, they all died, young and old. Not a single person remained to mourn or tend to the dead; everything was destroyed by God. They were found dead in their homes and beds. Along with the cry, God sent fire from the sky that incinerated them all, and that was their story.'"'

Author's comment: This narration includes some extraordinary details, such as people all drinking the milk of the camel and their faces changing colors day by day—although these are not problematic in of themselves given the miraculous context in which they occur. The Qur'an affirms this context, as it was known that the camel had a specific drinking day and the entire town had their own designated day for drinking as well.

As for the cry coming from Gabriel, it does not contradict the idea that it was a celestial bolt that descended upon them, killing them with its sound and burning them with its fire. There is nothing to preclude attributing an extraordinary or natural event to the actions of an angel if it falls within its mandate, just as all worldly events like death, life, and sustenance among others are attributed to the tasks of various angels.

As for the Imām's saying that they had shrouded themselves for burial in those three days, this could be read as a figure of speech signifying their readiness for death. Some of the narrations we have that describe the she-camel say that it was a mile wide, which weakens the narrative not due to its impossibility—since its existence was due to a miracle—but because, considering the proportions of a camels body, this would suggest its hump reached a height of almost three miles. It would be inconceivable, then, for a person to kill it with a sword, and this was not a miraculous feat performed by the one who hamstrung the camel. Nevertheless, the fact that God says, *This is a she-camel; she shall drink and you shall drink on known days*, suggests that her body was of incredible size.

On the Story of Ṣāliḥ

Thamūd, the people of Ṣāliḥ

Thamūd were an Arab people who lived in a settled valley between Medina and the Levant. They are prehistoric humans, who have left behind little concrete historical evidence for their lives, and the passage of time has all but erased any trace of them. Consequently, one cannot rely entirely

on the stories recounted about them.

What the Qur'anic narrative conveys with regard to them is that they were an Arab nation, as indicated by the name of their prophet. They emerged after the people of ʿĀd and had their own civilization and urban lifestyle. They developed the land, built palaces on its plains, and carved secure homes for themselves in the mountains (7:74). They were also engaged in agriculture and irrigation works, planting orchards and cultivating date palms and other crops (26:148).

Thamūd lived according to the customs of tribal peoples, in that they were governed by their nobles and their elders. In the city to which the prophet Ṣāliḥ was sent, there were nine leaders who spread corruption in the land and did not promote social reform (27:48). They were arrogant and tyrannical in the land, they worshipped idols, and they were excessively insolent and unjust.

The Mission of Ṣāliḥ

When Thamūd forgot their Lord and became profligate in their behavior, God sent them the prophet Ṣāliḥ. He came from a respected and noble family and was known for his intelligence and competence (11:62, 27:49). He called them to worship the One God alone, abandon their idols, promote justice and good conduct in their society, avoid arrogance, extravagance, and tyranny, and warned them of divine punishment should they fail to comply (see the accounts in *sūra*s 11, 26, 91, and others).

Ṣāliḥ undertook his mission to call people to the religion of God with wisdom and good advice, and he was steadfast in the face of the hardships and persecution he faced for the sake of God. Only a small group of the weaker members of Thamūd's society believed in him (7:75), whereas the arrogant tyrants and most of those who followed them, persisted in their disbelief. They belittled those who believed in him and accused him of being foolish and practicing magic (7:66, 26:153, 27:47).

They asked him for clear proof of his claims and demanded a miraculous sign to confirm his prophethood: They proposed that he bring forth a she-camel from the mountain rock. He did so, just as they had demanded, and said to them: 'God commands you to drink from your water spring one day and to let the she-camel drink from it on another day. She has a known day for drinking, and so do you. And you must let her graze on

God's earth as she pleases and do not harm her, lest you be taken by an imminent punishment' (7:72, 11:64, 26:156).

For a while, the people did exactly as God had bid them, but then they became rebellious and started scheming. They sent the worst of themselves to kill the she-camel, and he hamstrung her. Then they challenged Ṣāliḥ , 'Bring us what you promised us if you are truthful.' Prophet Ṣāliḥ responded, *'Enjoy yourselves in your abode for three days: that is a promise not to be belied!'* (11:65).

Then, the people of the city and their leaders began to plot against Ṣāliḥ. They conspired to attack him and his family at night, then tell his clan that they had not witnessed the destruction of his family and that swear that they were truthful. They plotted and schemed, but God also had a plan, and they were unaware (27:50). Then they were seized by a thunderbolt (51:44), an earthquake, and a loud scream, and they dropped dead in their homes. Ṣāliḥ turned away from them, saying, *O my people! Certainly I communicated to you the message of my Lord, and I was your well-wisher, but you did not like well-wishers'* (7:79, 11:67). God saved Ṣāliḥ those who believed and were righteous with him (41:18). After the deed had been done, a divine caller proclaimed: *Look! Indeed Thamūd defied their Lord. Look! Away with Thamūd!*

The Character of Ṣāliḥ

There is no mention of this prophet in the current Torah. Ṣāliḥ was from the people of Thamūd and was, chronologically, the third prophet mentioned in the Qur'an who stood up for monotheism and against idol worship. God mentioned him after Noah and Hūd, praised him, and conferred upon him the same honors as He did to His other prophets and messengers. He was chosen and favored, like all of them, above all the worlds. Peace be upon him.

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Verses 69–76

This section of verses covers the story of the glad tidings given to the prophet Abraham that he would be granted a son. This serves as an introduction to the following story of the angels going to the prophet Lot to destroy his people. The story of Lot is a continuation of this one, and the ending of the story of Abraham provides context for the story of Lot, as it concludes with the words of the angels: '*Your Lord's edict has certainly come, and an irrevocable punishment shall overtake them*' (11:76).

وَلَقَدْ جَاءَتْ رُسُلُنَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ بِالْبُشْرَىٰ قَالُوا سَلَامًا ۖ قَالَ سَلَامٌ ۖ فَمَا لَبِثَ أَنْ جَاءَ بِعِجْلٍ حَنِيذٍ ﴿٦٩﴾

(11:69) *Certainly Our messengers came to Abraham with the good news* (bushrā)*, and said, 'Peace!' 'Peace!' He replied. Presently he brought a roasted calf* ('ijl ḥanīdh).

Bushrā means the same as *bashāra* ('good news'), while an *'ijl* ('calf') refers to the offspring of a cow, and *ḥanīdh* ('roasted') is a passive participle, which denotes meat that has been grilled on hot stones. According to some scholars of language, *ḥanīdh* specifically denotes meat that has been roasted on stones that have been heated by the sun. Others have said that it is meat roasted in such a way that it drips juices and fat. Others say that it is any kind of roasted meat. The verse in Sūrah al-Dhāriyāt, *Then he retired to his family and brought a fat calf* (51:26), seems to support the second of these meanings.

The phrase, *Certainly* (la-qad) *Our messengers came to Abraham with the good news*, is follows on from the earlier verse, *Certainly* (la-qad) *We sent Noah to his people* (11:25). In *Majma' al-Bayān*, al-Ṭabrisī writes: 'The *lām* (in *la-qad*) is for emphasis, and the use of *qad* suggests that the audience who are listening to the stories of the prophets are expecting to hear one story after another.'

The 'messengers' mentioned in this verse are none other than the angels sent to Abraham to give him good news and to Lot to destroy his people.

Commentators on the Qur'an hold differing views about their number, but it is certain that there were more than two of them because the term 'messengers' (*rusul*) is a plural, and in Arabic, the plural form signifies three or more. Some traditions from the Household of the Prophet mention that there were four angels. These traditions will be discussed below.

The account here does not explicitly tell us what good news the angels brought to Abraham. All we are told is that the good news concerns his wife. However, the good news for Abraham himself is mentioned elsewhere, as in the chapters *al-Ḥijr* and *al-Dhāriyāt*, but they do not identify which son was mentioned in this good news: Isaac or Ishmael, or whether the good news was about both of them. The context of the story in this chapter would suggest that the good news was about Isaac. A comprehensive discussion about this will come at the end of the story.

The phrase, ... *and said, 'Peace!' 'Peace!' He replied*, means they exchanged greetings. (They) *said, 'Peace!'* means they told him: 'Peace be upon you!'—*'Peace!' He replied*, means he told them: 'And peace be upon you!'

Note that the word 'peace' (*salāmun*) in Abraham's greeting is indefinite, which in a greeting context either implies that it refers to the general concept of peace, or that it has been left indefinite in order to magnify and aggrandize it. Some commentators have also pointed out that the angels greeting is in the accusative (*salāman*), while Abraham's is in the nominative (*salāmun*) and said that this is more eloquent and expressive than the accusative case. Therefore, it shows that Abraham greeted them with the best of greetings, showing them the utmost generosity of spirit, because he thought that they were guests.

فَلَمَّا رَأَىٰٓ أَيْدِيَهُمْ لَا تَصِلُ إِلَيْهِ نَكِرَهُمْ وَأَوْجَسَ مِنْهُمْ خِيفَةً ۚ قَالُوا لَا تَخَفْ إِنَّا أُرْسِلْنَا إِلَىٰ قَوْمِ لُوطٍ ﴿٧٠﴾

(11:70) ***But when he saw their hands not reaching for it, he took them amiss and felt a fear of them*** **(awjasa min-hum khīfa).** ***They said, 'Do not be afraid. We have been sent to the people of Lot.'***

The phrase, '*their hands not reaching for it*' means that they were not reaching out to partake of the food Abraham had offered them, which is a mark of hostility or ill-intent. Therefore, Abraham mistrusted them

and felt afraid.

The verb *ījās* (from whence *awjasa* is derived) refers to internal apprehension, rather than an external show of fear. Al-Rāghib writes: '*Wajas* is a quiet sound, *tawajjas* means to listen attentively for something, while *ījās* means to experience it within oneself. Therefore, when God says of Abraham, *awjasa min-hum khīfa*, this means he experienced an internal sense of fear. The active participle *wājis* denotes a state of mind that arises out of a source of concern, because a source of concern gives rise to worries, which give rise to fear.' Therefore, the sentence alludes to the fact that a kind of fear or apprehension entered Abraham's heart when he saw his guests not partaking of the food, and *ījās* conjures the image of fear as a faint sound in one's inner world that is heard by the heart. In other words, he detected fear in himself, which is why the angels immediately hasted to reassure him with the words, *'Do not be afraid. We have been sent to the people of Lot.'*

Therefore, the meaning of the verse is that when Abraham presented his guests (who had appeared in the guise of human beings) with a roasted calf, he noted they did not eat from it, like someone who was deliberately refraining from eating—which would be a sign of evil intent. This caused him to feel apprehensive of them, so they reassured him by saying, *'Do not be afraid. We have been sent to the people of Lot.'* It was at this point he realized they were angels, who were spiritual beings and, therefore, neither ate, nor drank, nor had any physical needs, and that they were on an important mission.

Attributing a feeling fear to Abraham does not conflict with his status as a divine messenger, which is associated with infallibility from sin and moral faults. Fear, in general, is an emotional reaction to witnessing something unpleasant, which leads one to be wary of it and take action to avoid it. This is not, in itself, a fault. The real fault is an emotional reaction that results in the inability to resist fear and leads to panic and confusion, which prevent the person from forming a plan to avert the feared outcome. This is what we call cowardice. Conversely, not reacting at all to an unpleasant situation, which is called recklessness, is not a virtue either.

This is because God did not create such emotional states that transpire in the soul—such as being affected and reacting when witnessing something evil or unpleasant, or experiencing longing, desire, love, and the like

when witnessing something good or pleasant—in vain. Pursuing what is good and beneficial and warding off what is evil and harmful is what all creatures, in their multiplicity, are naturally inclined to do. This is the very axis around which the existence of the natural order revolves.

Since human beings survive and grow through their faculties of sensation and desire, their ability to attract or repel things stems from their sensations and desires, and this is only possible if they are psychologically affected by external stimuli. When they perceive something pleasant and desirable, this stimulates attraction and want, while if it is something unpleasant and undesirable, it stimulates fear or revulsion.

Because these internal psychological states can sometimes lead a person to either of the extremes of excess or neglect, it is incumbent on the person to repel those things which are necessary to repel, which is the virtue of courage (*shujāʿa*), and to attract those things which are necessary to attract, which is the virtue of chastity (*ʿiffa*). Both courage and chastity are states of moderation between the extremes of excess and neglect. For example, when someone does not feel fear and throws themselves into danger in order to repel something unpleasant, this is recklessness. Or, if someone does not desire to attract anything pleasant for himself, this is laziness. Likewise, if someone is so powerfully affected by fear that they forget themselves and fall prey to panic and confusion at the first sign of danger, this is cowardice. Or, if they wantonly succumb to whatever they desire without restraint, like an animal to fodder, this is greed. All of these are examples of vices.

What God has graced His prophets with, in terms of protection from sin (or infallibility, *ʿiṣma*), is establishing the virtue of courage in their souls without recklessness. Courage is not the opposite of fear, which is a natural emotional response to the sight of something unpleasant and which calls upon the soul to fulfil the duty of protecting itself. Instead, courage is the opposite of cowardice, which is when a person's emotional reaction is so strong that they render thought and planning useless and result in loss and defeat.

God says: *such as deliver the messages of Allah and fear Him, and fear no one except Allah* (33:39). He said to Moses, peace be upon him: *Do not be afraid. Indeed you will have the upper hand …* (20:68). He also recounts Jethro words to him: *'Do not be afraid. You have been delivered from the wrongdoing lot.'* (28:25). And He said to His Prophet: *And if you fear*

treachery from a people, break off with them in a like manner (8:58).

Abraham was a noble prophet who called people to the truth, only ever speaking the name of God. He opposed the idolatry of his people, debating with his father Terah (Azar) and his own people, as well as the tyrant king Nimrod, who claimed divinity for himself. Abraham smashed the idols worshipped by his people, causing them to throw him into a great fire from which God saved him. Nothing deterred him from these endeavours, or from striving in the path of God, and he was never defeated. Now when a prophet with such a lofty spiritual station felt fear of something, apprehension of someone, or concern about a situation—as many different verses attest—then this fear was in fact a sign of wisdom, not cowardice. If he feared for his life, honor, or property, then he feared for these for the sake of God, not for his own personal desires.

وَامْرَأَتُهُ قَائِمَةٌ فَضَحِكَتْ فَبَشَّرْنَاهَا بِإِسْحَاقَ وَمِنْ وَرَاءِ إِسْحَاقَ يَعْقُوبَ ﴿٧١﴾

(11:71) *His wife, standing by, laughed* (ḍaḥikat)*, so We gave her the good news of Isaac, and of Jacob, after Isaac.*

The verb *ḍaḥikat* ('she laughed') actually signifies that she menstruated, as supported by the fact that God says that He gave her the good news as a result of this: '*so We gave her the good news ...*' Her menstruation is a sign intended to convince her of the good news and prepare her soul for accepting its truthfulness. She is described as '*standing by*' is intended to reflect the unexpectedness of this situation: It never crossed her mind that she would menstruate, being an old woman. She was simply observing the events and conversation that were transpiring between her husband and their guests.

The meaning here is that while Abraham was talking to the guests about the food, his wife was standing there watching what was going on between them all. Nothing else was on her mind, and then she was surprised to find herself menstruating, whereat the angels gave her the good news that she would bear a child.

Most commentators have understood the term '*laughed*' literally, as the opposite of crying, but they disagree about the cause of her laughter. The most plausible explanation is that she was standing there, becoming

frightened by the guests' refusal to eat, as this suggested they were dangerous. However, when she realized they were holy angels visiting her home and that there was no danger, she felt joy and laughed, and they gave her the good news of Isaac and, after Isaac, Jacob.

There are other explanations given for her laughter that are not supported by evidence. For example, some have said that she laughed out of astonishment at the obliviousness of Lot's people, or because the guests refused to eat even though she served them herself, and that it was a signal to Abraham to bring Lot here as she foresaw his people's transgressions leading to their destruction. So that when she heard from the angels saying, 'We have been sent to the people of Lot,' she was pleased and laughed because her opinion had been confirmed. Some say she laughed out of astonishment at the good news of having a child in her old, barren age. In this reading, however, the sequence should be understood as: 'We gave her the good news of Isaac, and of Jacob, after Isaac ... she laughed.'

... so We gave her the good news of Isaac, and of Jacob, after Isaac—Isaac is her son with Abraham, and Jacob is the son of Isaac. So, what the angels meant was that they gave her the good news that she will give birth to Isaac, and Isaac will have a son named Jacob, one son after another. This is based on the recitation that places a *fatḥa* on Jacob (Yaʿqūb) because of an implicit preposition. However, it can also be recited with a *ḍamma*, which signifies it is an explanation of the remainder of the good news. The former option is the most likely of the two.

The phrase, *and of Jacob, after Isaac*, hints at why Jacob (Yaʿqūb) was so named. As per the prophecy, he would 'follow' (*yaʿqub*) after his father Isaac. This corrects the etymology given for his name in the Torah.

In the present Torah, it is stated: 'and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah daughter of Bethuel the Aramean from Paddan Aram and sister of Laban the Aramean. Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife, because she was childless. The Lord answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, "Why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the Lord. The Lord said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger." When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. The first to come out

was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau. After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob."[1] This correction of the Biblical account is one of the subtle points of eloquence found in the Qur'an.

قَالَتْ يَا وَيْلَتَىٰ أَأَلِدُ وَأَنَا عَجُوزٌ وَهَٰذَا بَعْلِي شَيْخًا ۖ إِنَّ هَٰذَا لَشَيْءٌ عَجِيبٌ ﴿٧٢﴾

(11:72) *She said, 'O woe is me!* (yā waylatī) *Shall I, an old woman* (ʿajūz)*, bear a child, and this husband* (*baʿal*) *of mine is an old man?! That is indeed a wondrous thing* (shayʾ ʿajīb)*!'*

The expression *wayl* ('woe') signifies something unpleasant, a loss that causes regret, such as death, disaster, shocking news, or a scandal. When one invokes it with the preposition *yā*, it metaphorically represents the presence and occurrence of the woe. For example, 'O woe is me' means 'I am surrounded by what causes me regret.'

An *ʿajūz* is an elderly lady, while *baʿal* means 'husband.' It originally meant someone who takes care of matters and has no need of others. It is said about a palm tree that relies on the rain for water instead of rivers and springs, that it is *baʿal*. The term is also used for a master or a lord. From this, comes the name of the city 'Baalbek' because it had a temple dedicated to an idol (or 'lord', *baʿal*).

The adjective *ʿajīb* ('wondrous') is derived from the verb *ʿajab*, which refers to the state of wonderment experienced by a human being when they witness something whose cause they cannot fathom. For this reason, it is often used in reference to rare or unusual or events, as their causes are typically unknown. So, when Abraham's wife says, *'O woe is me! Shall I, an old woman, bear a child...?'* she is expression astonishment and regret, as when

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1 Genesis 25:20–26. New International Version. According to Genesis 25:26, the name *Yaʿaqōv* is derived from *ʿaqev* ('heel'), because Jacob came out of the womb after his twin brother Esau, holding on to his heel: 'After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob' Note that in the Torah also (Genesis 27:5–7), Isaac originally intended to bless Esau as his successor, but Jacob tricked Isaac into blessing him with the help of his mother. Therefore, the Qur'anic account makes clear that Isaac's successor was always destined to be Jacob. (Trans.)

she received the angels' glad tidings, the situation presented to her was that of an old, barren woman and an old, decrepit man, both advanced in age, conceiving a child. This was an astonishing matter, given the humiliation and disgrace associated with such an event amongst people, who would laugh and scoff at them, and this would be a source of scandal.

قَالُوا أَتَعْجَبِينَ مِنْ أَمْرِ اللَّهِ ۖ رَحْمَتُ اللَّهِ وَبَرَكَاتُهُ عَلَيْكُمْ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ ۚ
إِنَّهُ حَمِيدٌ مَجِيدٌ ﴿٧٣﴾

(11:73) *They said, 'Are you amazed at Allah's dispensation? Allah's mercy and His blessings upon you, members of the household. Indeed He is all-laudable, all-glorious* (hamīd, majīd)*.'*

Majd ('glory') refers to generosity, and the *majīd* is the generous one who gives abundantly. The meanings of the remaining vocabulary in the verse have been explained earlier.

Their saying, *'Are you amazed at Allah's dispensation?'* is a rhetorical question meant to reprimand her. The angels rebuked her astonishment because astonishment typically arises because someone is ignorant of the cause of a matter and finds it strange. However, the matter in question here is ascribed to God, the Glorious and Exalted, who does as He wills and has power over all things. Therefore, it should not be a source of astonishment.

God Almighty had already bestowed upon the house of Abraham great favors and lofty gifts that distinguished them from all other people. So, it should hardly surprise them if a new blessing that distinguishes them from all other people is added to the blessings He has already bestowed—namely, a child from two old parents who would typically not produce a child.

For the reason mentioned, the angels said to her in reproach at the astonishment they had witnessed from her: *'Are you amazed at Allah's dispensation?'* They ascribed the matter to God to remove any astonishment and confusion because nothing is difficult for Him, as He is the Creator of all things.

Secondly, they said: '*Allah's mercy and His blessings upon you, members of the household.*' By saying this, they reminded Abraham's wife that God had continuously bestowed His mercy and blessings upon them, the people of the house. So, it is not beyond the realm of likelihood that such mercy and blessings could include the birth of a child to parents beyond

their normal childbearing years. The phrase '*Indeed He is all-laudable, all-glorious*' is presented as a rationale for the statement, *Allah's mercy and His blessings upon you, members of the household*.' In other words: 'God is the source of all praiseworthy acts and the origin of all generosity and goodness. His mercy and blessings overflow onto whomsoever of His servants He wills.'

فَلَمَّا ذَهَبَ عَنْ إِبْرَاهِيمَ الرَّوْعُ وَجَاءَتْهُ الْبُشْرَىٰ يُجَادِلُنَا فِي قَوْمِ لُوطٍ ﴿٧٤﴾

(11:74) *So when the awe* (rawʿ) *had left Abraham and the good news had reached him, he argued* (yujādilunā) *with Us concerning the people of Lot.*

Rawʿ ('awe') here implies fear and horror, and *mujādila* ('to argue') originally means to persistently debate and question to make ones opinion prevail. This means that when Abraham's fear had subsided, realizing that those who had come to him meant no harm and harboured no ill intentions towards him or his family, he received the good news that God would bless him and his wife with Isaac, and after Isaac, Jacob. He then began to debate with the angels about the people of Lot, in an effort to avert the punishment from them.

The phrase, *he argued with Us concerning the people of Lot*, either denotes a past state or suggests the presence of an implicit past-tense verb before it with the meaning: 'He began to argue with us ...', this is because the consequent of 'when...' (*lammā*) at the beginning of the verse usually takes the form of a past-tense verb.

Based on the wording of the verse, it appears that the angels first told him that they were sent to the people of Lot. Then they gave him the good news, before informing him of the specific punishment destined for the people of Lot. Abraham then started to plead with them to avert this punishment. However, they informed him that the verdict was inevitable, and the punishment was impending and irreversible.

The debate that God mentioned between Abraham and the angels is fleshed-out in another verse: *And when Our messengers came to Abraham with the good news, they said, 'We are indeed going to destroy the people of this town. Its people are indeed wrongdoers.' He said, 'Lot is indeed in it.' They said, 'We know better those who are in it. We will surely deliver him and his*

family, except his wife: she shall be one of those who remain behind' (29:32).

إِنَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ لَحَلِيمٌ أَوَّاهٌ مُنِيبٌ ﴿٧٥﴾

(11:75) *Abraham was indeed most forbearing* (ḥalīm), *plaintive* (awwāh), *penitent* (munīb)

Ḥalīm ('forbearing') describes someone who does not rush to punish someone or take revenge. *Awwāh* ('plaintive') describes someone who often laments the evil that he experiences or witnesses. *Munīb* ('penitent') describes someone who returns, and what is meant here is that he returned every matter to God.

The context of the present verse indicates that it is intended to explain the rationale behind Abraham's actions in the previous one— *he argued with Us concerning the people of Lot*—and to show that not only was he not blameworthy for arguing on behalf of Lot's people, but deserving of praise. It was because of his forbearance that he was not eager to bring down punishment on the wrongdoers, because he hoped that they might still be guided and change their ways. He was also deeply distressed by people's misguidance and their impending destruction, and he constantly turned to God for their salvation. This is not to say that he did not believe the wrongdoers were deserving of punishment or that he stood up for them in spite of their wrongdoings, far be it from him to do so.

يَا إِبْرَاهِيمُ أَعْرِضْ عَنْ هَٰذَا ۖ إِنَّهُ قَدْ جَاءَ أَمْرُ رَبِّكَ ۖ وَإِنَّهُمْ آتِيهِمْ عَذَابٌ غَيْرُ مَرْدُودٍ ﴿٧٦﴾

(11:76) *'O Abraham, let this matter alone! Your Lord's edict has certainly come, and an irrevocable punishment shall overtake them.'*

This is the response of the angels to Abraham's plea, putting a stop to his arguments by making him aware that there was no point in trying to avert the punishment from Lot's people, because the divine decree was definitive and, therefore, the punishment was inevitable. They said, '*O Abraham, let this matter alone!*', meaning, give up your arguing, and do not hope for their salvation, because that would be desiring something impossible.

When the angels say, '*Your Lord's edict has certainly come ...*', this means that His decree has reached an irreversible point, it cannot be reversed or altered. The following statement confirms this, '*... and an irrevocable punishment shall overtake them*.' This shows that even if it is a future event, once the divine command has been issued, it never deviates from what God has decreed. Further confirmation is also found in the upcoming verses about the people of Lot, *So when Our edict came, We made its topmost part its nethermost* (11:82.

As for when they say, '*...and an irrevocable punishment shall overtake them*', this means that this is a punishment that cannot be prevented or warded off by any means. God's judgement is the final word and it cannot be reversed. This statement serves to reinforce the preceding statements, and the context actually demands such a confirmation. This is why both of these statements begin with the particle of emphasis, *inna* ('certainly', 'indeed') and why they ascribe this decree to Abraham's '*Lord*' rather than to God, to emphasise His authority and persuade Abraham to desist from arguing further.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *al-Kāfī*, al-Kulaynī narrates from Abū Yazīd al-Ḥammār from Imām al-Ṣādiq: 'God sent four angels to destroy the people of Lot: Gabriel, Michael, Raphael, and Kerubiel. They passed by Abraham and greeted him while in disguise, so he did not recognise them. He saw their handsome appearance and said, "None but myself shall host these as guests." Abraham was a man known for his hospitality, so he roasted a fat calf for them. When it was cooked, he served it to them. However, when he saw their hands not reaching towards it, he became suspicious and felt afraid. When Gabriel saw this, he unveiled his face, and Abraham recognized him and said, "Is it you?" Gabriel replied, "Yes." Then his wife passed by. She was given the good news of having Isaac and, after Isaac, Jacob. She exclaimed, "What! God says so?" They responded with what is in the Qur'an.

Abraham asked them, "Why have you come?"

They replied, "We have come to destroy the people of Lot."

Abraham asked, "If there are a hundred believers among them,

will you destroy them?"
Gabriel replied, "No."
He asked, "What if there are fifty?"
Gabriel said, "No."
He asked, "What if there are thirty?"
Gabriel said, "No."
He asked, "What if there are twenty?"
Gabriel said, "No."
He asked, "What if there are ten?"
Gabriel said, "No."
He asked, "What if there is one?" Gabriel said, "No."
He said, "Lot is indeed in it." They said, "We know better those who are in it. We will surely deliver him and his family, except his wife: she shall be one of those who remain behind." (29:32) Then they left.'
Al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī said, "I cannot think of this conversation but as a way of him delaying them. This is the saying of God Almighty: *he argued with Us concerning the people of Lot.*"' This is a topic we will discuss further in our commentary on the story of Lot.

Author's comment: When he says, 'I cannot think of think conversation but as a way of him delaying them', this is an explanation that can also be inferred from God Almighty's saying, Abraham was indeed most forbearing, plaintive, penitent. In fact, this is the most appropriate meaning, as it suggests his intention was to delay the angels' destruction of Lot's people, rather than delaying their going to God's prophet, Lot. This is because the statements, *he argued with Us concerning the people of Lot*, and, *and an irrevocable punishment shall overtake them*, both suggest his intent was to delay the destruction of the people.

(2) In *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, it is narrated from ʿAbd Allāh b. Sinān, that he heard Imām al-Ṣādiq say: 'He brought them a well-cooked, tender, roasted calf.'

(3) In *Maʿānī al-akhbār*, al-Ṣadūq narrates via a reliable chain of narrators from ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. al-Ḥajjāj, from Abū ʿAbd Allāh, about the verse: (she) *laughed, so We gave her the good news of Isaac* (11:71): 'It means, "she menstruated."'

(4) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, al-Suyūṭī cites Isḥāq b. Bishr and Ibn ʿAsākir, who narrate from Juwaybar, from al-Ḍaḥḥāk, from Ibn

ʿAbbās: ʿWhen Abraham saw that their hands did not reach the calf, he mistook them and was afraid of them. In those times, if one person intended to harm another, they would avoid eating from his food. They would say: "If you host someone with food, it becomes forbidden for him to harm you." Abraham feared that they intended to harm him, and his limbs began to tremble.

His wife, Sarah, was standing and serving them. Whenever he wanted to host a guest, Sarah would serve them. Sarah laughed, and she laughed because she said, "Oh, Abraham, why are you afraid? They are just three people, and you have your family and servants." Gabriel said to her, "O you who laughs, you will bear a boy, and his name will be Isaac, and after him, a boy whose name will be Jacob." She turned away and slapped her face, then she turned around, wailing, and placed her hand on her face in embarrassment. Hence, the verse, *she beat her face* (51:29) and she said, ʿ*Shall I, an old woman, bear a child, and this husband of mine is an old man?*' (11:72).

Then God gave good news to Abraham. *So when the awe had left Abraham and the good news had reached him, he argued with Us concerning the people of Lot* (11:74). His argument was as follows: he asked Gabriel, "Where are you going? And to whom have you been sent?" Gabriel replied, "We have been sent to the people of Lot and we have been commanded to punish them".

Abraham then said, *"Lot is indeed in it."*

They replied, "*We know better those who are in it. We will surely deliver him and his family, except his wife*." (29:32) Some claim his wife was known as Walqa.

Then Abraham asked, "If there were a hundred believers among them, would you still punish them?"

Gabriel replied, "No".

He asked, "What if there were ninety believers?"

Gabriel replied, "No".

He asked, "What if there were eighty believers among them? Would you still punish them?"

Gabriel replied, "No".

This continued until he reached the number of one believer, to

which Gabriel replied, "No". When they did not mention to Abraham that there was even one believer among them, he said, "Indeed, Lot is among them". They replied, "We know who is among them. We will save him and his family except his wife".

Author's comment: The text of the tradition is somewhat confused, as Abraham mentions 'Lot is among them' twice, but the meaning is clear.

(5) In the *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, it is narrated from Abū Ḥamza al-Thumālī, from Imām al-Bāqir: 'When God decreed the punishment of the people of Lot and ordained it, He wanted to compensate Abraham for the loss of the people of Lot with a wise son, to comfort him for the loss of the people of Lot.

So God sent angelic messengers to Abraham, giving him good news of Ishmael. They visited him at night, and he was frightened of them, fearing they were thieves. But when the messengers saw he was afraid, they said, "Peace." He replied, "Peace, we were afraid of you." They said, "*Do not be afraid. Indeed we give you good news of a wise son.*'"

Imām al-Bāqir continued: 'And the wise boy is Ishmael, from Hagar. Then Abraham said to the messengers, "'*Do you give me good news though old age has befallen me? What is the good news that you bring me?*'" They said, "*We bring you good news in truth; so do not be among the despondent.*" Abraham said to the messengers, "*O messengers, what is now your errand?*" They said, "*We have been sent toward a guilty people* the people of Lot. They were indeed disobedient. So let us warn them of the punishment of the Lord of the Worlds." Abraham said, *'Lot is indeed in it.' They said, 'We know better those who are in it. We will surely deliver him and his family, except his wife.* (29:32) *We have ordained she will indeed be among those who remain behind.*" (15:53–15:60)

When God punished them, He sent angelic messengers again to Abraham, bringing him glad tidings of Isaac and consoling him over the destruction of Lot's people. This is referred to in the verse: *Certainly Our messengers came to Abraham with the good news, and said, 'Peace!' 'Peace!' He replied—'an unfamiliar folk.'—Presently he brought a roasted calf* (11:69 and 51:25). He offered them a clean, grilled, well-cooked calf. But when he saw

> they did not reach for it with their hands, he distrusted them and felt a sense of fear. They said, "Do not fear, we have been sent to the people of Lot and to his wife who stands."' Imām al-Bāqir added: 'By "his wife who stands", they meant Sarah. They gave her glad tidings of Isaac, and after Isaac, Jacob. She laughed because she was amazed by their words."

Author's comment: As you can see, the narration presents the story of the good news brought to Abraham as two stories: the good news about Ishmael and the good news about Isaac, who was born several years after Ishmael. Then the verses of Sūrah al-Ḥijr, which do not mention Abraham offering the roasted calf to the guests, are interpreted as the good news about Ishmael and what happens when God's punishment befalls the people of Lot. The verses from Sūrah al-Dhāriyāt and Sūrah Hūd, which are mixed together in the narration, are interpreted as the good news to Sarah about Isaac and Jacob, which only occurred after the destruction of the people of Lot. They returned to Abraham, informed him of the punishment, and gave him the second good news.

As for the verses in Sūrah al-Ḥijr, these can be understood on their own as the good news about Ishmael, just as the verses in Sūrah al-Dhāriyāt can be understood as describing the aftermath that followed the destruction of the people of Lot and the good news about Isaac and Jacob at that time.

As for the verses of the present chapter, they are explicit in giving good news about Isaac and Jacob, but the following verses, *he argued with Us concerning the people of Lot. Abraham was indeed most forbearing, plaintive, penitent* (11:74–75) cannot describe the events that followed the destruction of Lot's people. Even if we say the verses *When Our messengers came to Lot*, do not necessarily preclude these verses describing the events that transpired after the punishment, as is also the case with the phrase, *Your Lord's edict has certainly come* (11:78), the context of the surrounding verses would appear to rule out such an explanation.

In short, what the verses in Sūrah Hūd appear to indicate is that Abraham received the announcement of good news about Isaac before the destruction of Lot's people, and it was at the same time that Abraham argued with the angels. This necessitates that the events described in Sūrah al-Dhāriyāt likewise transpired before the destruction of Lot's people, not after it. This is also the case with the account in Sūrah al-Ḥijr, which clearly

describes events that took place before their destruction and also mentions Abraham's debate with the angels. However, this does not explicitly mention Isaac or Jacob, only a 'wise son', said in the narration to be a reference to Ishmael.

Therefore, because the verses of this chapter mention both the good news of Isaac and Abraham's debate with the angels about the fate of Lot's people, this is clearly taking place prior to their destruction. This means that the good news in all three chapters—*Hūd*, *al-Ḥijr*, and *al-Dhāriyāt*—actually refer to good news being delivered about Isaac immediately before the punishment of Lot's people. This significantly weakens the reliability of the narration just quoted.

Another point about the narrative is that the laughter of Abraham's wife is taken as an expression of wonder at the news of Isaac. However, this means that while the order of the words in the verse is: (she) *laughed, so We gave her the good news of Isaac, and of Jacob, after Isaac*, the meaning is 'We gave her the good news of Isaac, and of Jacob, after Isaac, so she laughed.' However, reading the verse in this way requires us to deviate from the apparent meaning of the text without any clear reason for doing so.

(6) In *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, al-Faḍl b. Abī Qurra narrates from Imām al-Ṣādiq: 'God revealed to Abraham that he would have a child. So, he told Sarah and she said: '*Shall I, an old woman, bear a child?*' So God revealed to him: 'She will bear a child, and her offspring will suffer for four hundred years because she doubted the prophecy. When the suffering of the Children of Israel grew long, they wept and cried out to God for forty mornings. So, God revealed to Moses and Aaron to deliver them from Pharaoh, and so their torment was reduced by seventy and one hundred years.'

To this, the Imām added: 'You are in the same situation. So, if you did likewise, God would deliver us. If you do not, then the matter will continue on its course.'

Author's comment: The existence of a connection between a human being's conditions and traits and the physical structure of his body is undoubted. Each aspect of this connection has a unique impact and effect in the hereafter. For example, the sperm and the egg are taken from the physical matter, and carrying within themselves the physical and spiritual characteristics of the body. Therefore, it is possible that descendants inherit

some physical and spiritual characteristics of their ancestors.

We have also repeatedly mentioned in previous discussions that there is a strong connection between the spiritual attributes and moral conduct of a human being and external events, whether good or evil, as indicated by God's saying: *If the people of the towns had been faithful and Godwary, We would have opened to them blessings from the heaven and the earth* ... (7:96), and: *Whatever affliction that may visit you is because of what your hands have earned* ... (42:30).

Now, it is possible that a individual or a community might commit an act that is either righteous or immoral, or a moral quality might emerge from them, be it vice or virtue, and then its positive impact or evil consequence may appear in their descendants. This can be seen as a kind of inheritance, as mentioned above, and we have discussed this further in our commentary on the verse: *Let those fear* (the result of mistreating orphans) *who, were they to leave behind weak offspring, would be concerned on their account* (4:9).

(7) It is narrated from Zurāra, Ḥumrān, and Muḥammad b. Muslim from Imām al-Bāqir, and from ʿAbd al-Raḥmān from Imām al-Ṣādiq, regarding the verse: *Abraham was indeed most forbearing, plaintive, penitent* (11:75): 'This refers to supplication (*duʿā'*).' (*Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*)

Author's comment: The same interpretation has also been reported in *al-Kāfī*, from Zurāra, from Imām al-Bāqir.

(8) It is narrated from Abū Baṣīr from either Imām al-Bāqir or Imām al-Ṣādiq: 'Indeed, Abraham argued on behalf of the people of Lot and said: *"Lot is indeed in it." They said, "We know better those who are in it."* (29:32) Abraham increased in pleading, so Gabriel said: *"O Abraham, let this matter alone! Your Lord's edict has certainly come, and an irrevocable punishment shall overtake them."* (11:76)' (ibid.)

(9) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is related from Ibn al-Anbārī, in his *Kitāb al-Waqf wa al-Ibtidā'*, from Ḥassān b. Abjar: 'I was with Ibn ʿAbbās when a man from the tribe of Hudhayl came. Ibn ʿAbbās asked him: "What did so-and-so do?" He said: "He died and left behind four sons, and three after them *(min al-warā')*." Whereat Ibn ʿAbbās recited the verse: ... *so We gave her the good*

news of Isaac, and of Jacob, after Isaac (min warāʾ Isḥāq) (11:71), and said: "(*Min al-warāʾ*) refers to the son of a son."'

A Discourse on the Story of the Good News

The story of the good news, which God refers to as the story of Abraham's guests, is narrated in five chapters of the Qur'an, all of which are of Meccan provenance. In the order of their appearance in the Qur'an, these are the chapters *Hūd* (11), *al-Ḥijr* (15), *al-ʿAnkabūt* (29), *al-Ṣāffāt* (37), and *al-Dhāriyāt* (51).

The first narrative is found in verses 11:69–76, in which God says:
Certainly Our messengers came to Abraham with the good news, and said, 'Peace!' 'Peace!' He replied. Presently he brought a roasted calf.

But when he saw their hands not reaching for it, he took them amiss and felt a fear of them. They said, 'Do not be afraid. We have been sent to the people of Lot.'

His wife, standing by, laughed, so We gave her the good news of Isaac, and of Jacob, after Isaac.

She said, 'O woe is me! Shall I, an old woman, bear a child, and this husband of mine is an old man?! That is indeed a wondrous thing!'

They said, 'Are you amazed at Allah's dispensation? Allah's mercy and His blessings upon you, members of the household. Indeed He is all-laudable, all-glorious.'

So when the awe had left Abraham and the good news had reached him, he argued with Us concerning the people of Lot.

Abraham was indeed most forbearing, plaintive, penitent.

'O Abraham, let this matter alone! Your Lord's edict has certainly come, and an irrevocable punishment shall overtake them.'

The second is in verses 15:51–60:
And inform them about the guests of Abraham,

when they entered into his presence and said, 'Peace!' He said, 'We are indeed afraid of you.'

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They said, 'Do not be afraid. Indeed we give you the good news of a wise son.'

He said, 'Do you give me good news though old age has befallen me? What is the good news that you bring me?'

They said, 'We bring you good news in truth; so do not be among the despondent.'

He said, 'Who despairs of his Lord's mercy except those who are astray?!'

He said, 'O messengers, what is now your errand?'

They said, 'We have been sent toward a guilty people,

except the family of Lot. We will indeed deliver all of them,

except his wife, We have ordained, will indeed be among those who remain behind.'

The third is in verses 29:31–32:
And when Our messengers came to Abraham with the good news, they said, 'We are indeed going to destroy the people of this town. Its people are indeed wrongdoers.'

He said, 'Lot is indeed in it.' They said, 'We know better those who are in it. We will surely deliver him and his family, except his wife: she shall be one of those who remain behind.'

The fourth is verses 37:99–113:
He said, 'Indeed I am going toward my Lord, who will guide me.'

'My Lord! Give me (an heir), one of the righteous.'

So We gave him the good news of a forbearing son.

When he was old enough to assist in his endeavour, he said, 'My son! I see in a dream that I am sacrificing you. See what you think.' He said, 'Father! Do whatever you have been commanded. If Allah wishes, you will find me to be patient.'

So when they had both submitted, and he had laid him down on his forehead,

We called out to him, 'O Abraham!

You have indeed fulfilled the vision! Thus indeed do We reward the virtuous!

This was indeed a manifest test.'

Then We ransomed him with a great sacrifice,

and left for him a good name in posterity:

'Peace be to Abraham!'

Thus do We reward the virtuous.

He is indeed one of Our faithful servants.

And We gave him the good news of Isaac, a prophet, one of the righteous.

And We blessed him and Isaac. Among their descendants some are virtuous, and some who manifestly wrong themselves.

The fifth and final narrative is in verses 51:24-30:
Did you receive the story of Abraham's honored guests?

When they entered into his presence, they said, 'Peace!' 'Peace!' He answered, an unfamiliar folk.'

Then he retired to his family and brought a fat calf,

and put it near them. He said, 'Will you not eat?'

Then he felt a fear of them. They said, 'Do not be afraid!' and they gave him the good news of a wise son.

Then his wife came forward crying. She beat her face, and said, 'A barren old woman!'

They said, 'So has your Lord said. Indeed He is the All-wise, the

All-knowing.'

Our analysis of the narratives of the story of the good news can be approached from a number of angles:

First: Whether there was a single story of good news that Abraham and Sarah received about Isaac and Jacob, which took place before the destruction of the people of Lot, or is two stories: One that includes the good news about Ishmael, while the other includes the good news of Isaac and Jacob.

The latter seems more likely based on what is explicitly stated in the narrative presented in Sūrah al-Dhāriyāt, which mentions the preparation of the roasted calf and that Abraham was afraid of the guests when they refrained from eating. Then they gave good news to him and his wife, who describes herself as 'a barren old women', and who was definitely Sarah, the mother of Isaac. The verses suggest that this took place after the destruction of the people of Lot, as the angels state, *They said, 'We have been sent toward a guilty people... so We picked out those who were in it of the faithful... and We have left therein a sign for those who fear a painful punishment'* (51:32–37). Verses with a similar meaning can be found in Sūrah Hūd, in which the angels say to Abraham to remove his fear: '*We have been sent to the people of Lot'* (11:70).

As for the narrative presented in Sūrah al-Ḥijr, it does not include the detail of Abraham preparing the roasted calf, but it appears that he and his family were frightened when the angels entered, so they reassured them and removed their fear by giving them glad tidings, as God says: *when they entered into his presence and said, 'Peace!' He said, 'We are indeed afraid of you.' They said, 'Do not be afraid. Indeed we give you the good news of a wise son'* (15:52–53). The subsequent verses imply that this took place before the destruction of Lot's people.

A similar narrative is presented in Sūrah al-ʿAnkabūt, for which it is even more clear that it occurred before the destruction of Lot's people as it includes Abraham's pleading on behalf of the people of Lot, as we discussed in relation to the narration from *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī* that we discussed above.

However, the reality is that the narratives of all four chapters: *Hūd*, *al-Ḥijr*, *al-ʿAnkabūt*, and *al-Dhāriyāt* narrate the story of the good news of the birth of Isaac and Jacob, but not of that of Ishmael.

As for what is send at the end of Sūrah al-Dhāriyāt, where we read: *They*

said, 'We have been sent …, which suggests that they had already completed their mission, we find the parallel of this in Sūrah al-Ḥijr, which scholars agree relates what happened before they completed their mission.

The angels' statement while still on their way to their task, *'We have been sent …'* does not conflict with the conventions of language or common sense.

As for the phrase, *So We picked out those who were in it of the faithful …*, these are the words of God Himself and not part of the angels' words to Abraham, as indicated by the context of the narratives presented in Sūrah al-Dhāriyāt.

The fact that Abraham's apprehension is mentioned at the beginning of the narrative in the verses of Sūrah al-Ḥijr, unlike in Sūrah al-Dhāriyāt and Hūd, is because this narrative omits the mention of him preparing the roasted calf, whereas the other two mention it. However, the close connection between the different parts of the story allows for some parts of it precede others at times and vice versa. For instance, God mentions Abraham's mistaking his guests in the verses of al-Dhāriyāt at the beginning of the story after their initial greeting, and in Sūrah Hūd in the middle of the story after their refusal to eat. This pattern occurs frequently in the structure of the Qur'an's narrative sections.

The verses of Sūrah Hūd explicitly state that the good news of Isaac and Jacob was delivered in the context of Abraham's pleading with the angels on behalf of the people of Lot, which leaves no doubt that it happened before the destruction of Lot's city. Hence, the good news of Isaac must have been delivered beforehand, not after.

It is well established that Ishmael was several years older than Isaac. If these angels had given Abraham the good news about Ishmael on their way to destroy the people of Lot on the eve of their punishment, and had given him the news about Isaac when they were departing from their destruction, then the gap between the two pieces of good news would have been a day or two. This would mean that there were several years between the good news of Isaac and his birth. However, the term 'good news' (*bushrā*) denotes good news whose occurrence is imminent unless there is some indication to the contrary, as for conveying good news that is not connected to a specific time, this would be signalled by the term 'promise' (*wa'd*).

Second: Was there any good news given to Abraham about Ishmael?

The truth is that the good news mentioned in the opening verses of Sūrah al-Ṣāffāt concerned Ishmael, and it is not the same good news that is mentioned at the end of the verses, the explicit annunciation of Isaac. The verses, *So We gave him the good news of a forbearing son* (37:101) until the explicit annunciation of Isaac in *And We gave him the good news of Isaac, a prophet, one of the righteous* (37:112) leaves no doubt that the 'forbearing son' who was announced first is not the same as Isaac who was announced second. Therefore, it could be none other than Ishmael.

In his *Ta'rīkh*, al-Ṭabarī says that the first good news in this chapter refers to the announcement of Isaac, following the pattern of annunciation in the other chapters. However, the problem with this reading should be evident. We have already discussed this in relation to the story of Abraham previously.

Third: It is to analyze the story from a comparative perspective, where we correlate the story in the present Torah to what can be derived from the Qur'anic account. This will be provided when discussing the story of Lot in the following verses.

Fourth: It is to investigate these events from the perspective of Abraham's argument with the angels, especially given the use of expressions such as, *he argued with Us concerning the people of Lot* (11:74) and '*O Abraham, let this matter alone!*' (11:76), which might suggest Abraham opposed the angel's mission. However, as we have already mentioned in our commentary on the verses of the present chapter, other statements—especially, *Abraham was indeed most forbearing, plaintive, penitent* (11:75)—show that he was only attributed with good qualities by the Qur'an. Therefore, his arguing with God reveals nothing other than his eagerness for the salvation of God's servants, hoping that they would be guided to the right path.

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Verses 77–83

This section of verses describes the punishment of Lot's people. It is essentially a continuation of the previous set of verses that narrated the angels' visit to Abraham to give him good news of the birth of Isaac, which served as a preface to the story of Lot and his people.

وَلَمَّا جَاءَتْ رُسُلُنَا لُوطًا سِيءَ بِهِمْ وَضَاقَ بِهِمْ ذَرْعًا وَقَالَ هَٰذَا يَوْمٌ عَصِيبٌ ﴿٧٧﴾

(11:77) *When Our messengers came to Lot, he was distressed on their account* (sīʾa bi-him) *and in a predicament for their sake* (wa ḍāq bi-him dharʿan)*, and he said, 'This is a terrible day* (yawm ʿaṣīb)*!'*

The phrase *sīʾa bi-him*—in the passive voice—means that the situation troubled him and brought him distress.

Dharʿ ('cubit', lit. 'forearm') is a unit of measurement for lengths, whose name is taken from the word forearm, because people used to measure with their forearms. It can also be used to denote the measure itself. The phrase *ḍāq … dharʿan* (lit. 'his arm was curtailed') is a figure of speech that means that one cannot find a way to save someone from a calamity or disaster, just as one is distressed if they cannot encompass something fully with their arm.

The adjective *ʿaṣīb* is a passive participle derived from the root *ʿasab*, meaning 'to bind.' To describe a day as *ʿaṣīb* means to say that it is a day bound up with such intense hardship that it cannot be relieved, nor can any of its parts be separated from the others.

Therefore, the meaning of the verse is: 'When our messengers, who are the angels that descended to Abraham came to Lot, their arrival troubled Lot, because he could not find a way to save them from the evil of his people. They appeared to him in the form of handsome young men, and his people were highly inclined to commit indecent acts. Therefore, he did not expect that they would leave his guests alone and let them be. Thus,

Lot could not help but exclaim, "*This is a terrible day*"—a day wrapped in layers of intense distress.'

وَجَاءَهُ قَوْمُهُ يُهْرَعُونَ إِلَيْهِ وَمِنْ قَبْلُ كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ السَّيِّئَاتِ ۚ قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ هَٰؤُلَاءِ بَنَاتِي هُنَّ أَطْهَرُ لَكُمْ ۖ فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَلَا تُخْزُونِ فِي ضَيْفِي ۖ أَلَيْسَ مِنْكُمْ رَجُلٌ رَشِيدٌ ﴿٧٨﴾

(11:78) *Then his people came running* (yuhraʿūn) *toward him, and they had been committing vices aforetime. He said, 'O my people, these are my daughters: they are purer for you. Be wary of Allah and do not humiliate me with regard to my guests. Is there not a right-minded man among you?'*

Al-Rāghib says: 'The verb *haraʿ* or *ahraʿa* means to drive something forward with threats and violence.' In *Kitāb al-ʿAyn*, we read: '*Ihrāʿ* (from whence is derived *yuhraʿūn*) means to drive forward with vigor.'

... and they had been committing vices aforetime—This means that had already been committing sins and indulging in immoral acts. In other words, they were audacious in their licentiousness and had grown accustomed to it to the extent that they could not be dissuaded from such acts, nor deterred by shame or guilt, nor prevented through admonition or rebuke. This is because when one is accustomed to something, even the most difficult things become easy and even the most repugnant things become normal.

This phrase can be read as an aside between the statement: *Then his people came running toward him ...* and the statement: *, 'O my people, these are my daughters ...*' It serves to illustrate that what drove them to come running towards Lot was their habituation to evil deeds. They had grown accustomed to committing indecency and were therefore drawn to him, intending to harm his guests.

The sentence implies that, due to their deeply ingrained habits, they refused to listen or to be admonished by warnings or advice. Therefore, Lot began by offering them his daughters, and then said to them: '*Be wary of Allah and do not humiliate me with regard to my guests ....*'

As for the statement, *'O my people, these are my daughters: they are purer* (aṭhar) *for you. Be wary of Allah and do not humiliate me with regard to*

my guests. Is there not a right-minded man among you?', this shows that when Lot saw his people had come together to do evil, he knew that mere words or stern language would not dissuade them from it. Therefore, he attempted to divert them by offering an alternative to the indecency they desired to commit, presenting something permissible instead, asserting that they were purer for them.

The use of the comparative form *aṭhar* ('purer') in the verse merely signifies being clean without any pollution. Here it implies purity in the general sense, which is a common style of expression. For example, see the verse: *What is with Allah is better than diversion* (62:11), and the verse: *And reconciliation is better* (4:128). These verses convey the meaning that one should always choose what one knows to be better with certainty.

The fact that Lot qualifies his statement, '*these are my daughters*' by saying, '*they are purer for you*', attests to the fact that he was offering his daughters for marriage, not merely for sexual gratification, which would not befit a prophet of God. This is because there is no purity in such base gratification, as God has said elsewhere: *Do not approach fornication. It is indeed an indecency and an evil way* (17:32), and: *... you shall not approach indecencies, the outward among them and the inward ones ...* (6:151). In our commentary on these verses, we explained that there are certain moral principles that were enshrined in all of the divine codes revealed by God to His prophets—and the prohibition in licentiousness and indecency is one such example.

From this, it becomes apparent that the position of those who say that Lot offered his daughters to the people without specifying that it was for marriage is flawed. I cannot see how it is possible to cure one form of indecency by resorting to another. After all, This would render his admonition that they '*Be wary of Allah*' virtually meaningless. And were he only interested in saving himself from shame and disgrace, he could have simply said, '*and do not humiliate me with regard to my guests*.'

Now, some might argue that when Lot said, '*these are my daughters*', he was referring to the womenfolk of his people, as a prophet is like a father to his nation and, therefore, their womenfolk are all his daughters and their menfolk are all his sons. Therefore, what he meant was that they should pursue women as nature intended, and that this was purer than seeking males through indecent acts. However, this interpretation is an arbitrary

reading that lacks any linguistic basis in the verse itself.

But what about the fact that they were disbelievers and his daughters were believers, and that it is not permissible for a believing woman to marry a non-believer? It is not known whether this principle was part of Abraham's teachings, which the prophet Lot followed. It's possible that in his law, the marriage of a believing woman to a nonbeliever was permissible, just like it was initially permissible in Islam. The Prophet Muḥammad himself married his daughter to Abū al-ʿĀṣ b. al-Rabīʿ, who was a nonbeliever, before the migration to Medina, but this law was later abrogated.

Furthermore, the people of Lot responded: *'You certainly know that we have no interest in your daughters, and indeed you know what we want'* (11:79). This does not make sense if when Lot said '*daughters*' he was referring to the womenfolk of his people rather than his own literal daughters. After all, his people did not believe in him, so they would not have acknowledged that their womenfolk were his daughters, unless they uttered these words mockingly, and there is no evidence of this.

It also does not make sense to say that Prophet Lot's reference to '*daughters*' in the plural form when he had only two of his own implies that by '*daughters*', he meant the women of his people, not his own daughters. This interpretation is not supported by the fact that he merely used the plural form of the word rather than the dual.

This is because we would argue that there is no evidence for his only having two daughters in the Qur'an, nor is there any reliable narration to this effect. Yes, it is mentioned in the present Torah that Lot had two daughters. However, we cannot depend on this in our understanding of the Qur'an. His statement, '*Be wary of Allah and do not humiliate me with regard to my guests*', clarifies what he meant. The phrase, '*and do not humiliate me with regard to my guests*' is an exposition of his admonition to '*Be wary of Allah*.' This is because Lot was only asking them not to harm his guests out of fear of God, not out of any personal desire or tribal prejudice, as he did not distinguish between his guests and others in what he admonished them for. After all, he had been exhorting them to refrain from immorality and preaching to them about this for many years.

He only referred to the principle of hospitality, associating the guest with himself, and the shame inflicted by their actions, in hopes of awakening their own sense of chivalry and honor. Hence, he followed up by

appealing for help, saying, '*Is there not a right-minded man among you?*' This shows that he hoped to find a right-minded individual who would stand up for him and his guests against these wrongdoers. But the people were, as God has said, *bewildered in their drunkenness* (15:72), and they remained unmoved by his plea.

قَالُوا لَقَدْ عَلِمْتَ مَا لَنَا فِي بَنَاتِكَ مِنْ حَقٍّ وَإِنَّكَ لَتَعْلَمُ مَا نُرِيدُ ﴿٧٩﴾

(11:79) *They said, 'You certainly know that we have no interest in your daughters, and indeed you know what we want.'*

This is the response of Lot's people to his call for them to seek divinely sanctioned marriage in place of indecency. In uttering these words they confirmed that they had no intention of marrying his daughters, that Lot already knew this, and that Lot knew who they were really seeking in their assault.

There are various explanations of their response. One is that it means they have no need for his daughters, and what a person doesn't need, it's as if he has no interest in. This expression is a form of metaphorical speech.

Others understand them as saying, 'We have no right to your daughters because we will not marry them,' and a man who doesn't marry a woman has no right over her. Therefore, by denying the right, they are denying the basis for it, which is marriage.

Another interpretation is that by 'interest', they mean inclination, rather than a legal or customary right, meaning they have no desire for them as they are women and have no inclination towards them.

However, what needs to be taken into account in our reading of the verse is that they did not simply say, 'we have no interest in (or right to) your daughters,' but rather, '*You certainly know that we have no interest in your daughters*'—therefore, they did not answer him directly but rather indicated that he was already well-aware of their answer to his offer. This suggests they were reminding him of a social norm among them that he was aware of: that they actually forbade approaching women, particularly by force or coercion, or had ceased approaching women altogether, considering it permissible only to approach men or boys for sexual gratification instead.

The Qur'an indicates that Lot had been trying to deter them from this

practice in the course of his preaching. For example, it quotes him as telling them, '*Indeed you come to men with desire instead of women! Rather you are a profligate lot*' (7:81), '*What! Of all people do you come to males, abandoning your wives your Lord has created for you? Rather you are a transgressing lot.*' (26:164–165), and '*What! Do you come to men, and cut off the way, and commit outrages in your gatherings?*" (29:29). There is no doubt that societal norms establish a right to do something, while a norm to avoid something denies that right.

In sum, they called his attention to what he already knew on the basis of the societal norms, namely, their lack of interest in his daughters because they were women, and their intentions for attacking his house. This is probably the best explanation of their response, followed by the third one cited above.

قَالَ لَوْ أَنَّ لِي بِكُمْ قُوَّةً أَوْ آوِي إِلَىٰ رُكْنٍ شَدِيدٍ ﴿٨٠﴾

(11:80) *He said, 'If only I had some power through you* (law anna lī bi-kum quwwa)*, or could take refuge in a mighty support* (aw āwī ilā ruknin shadīd)*!'*

It is said that the verb *āwī* ('take refuge') means to join or ally oneself to another. A *rukn* ('support') literally denotes what holds up the structure of a building after the foundations.

Therefore, it is evident that when Lot tried to admonish them by urging them to be wary of God and awaken their sense of honor to respect the sanctity of his station and his dignity, and cautioning them against trespassing on his guests, which would bring him shame and disgrace, and when he suggested they marry his daughters instead of violating his guests, and called for the help from the right-minded amongst them, hoping that there would be a reasonable man who would stand up to support him and repel their attack, not a single person responded. When no right-minded person came to his aid, and when they replied, *'You certainly know that we have no interest in your daughters, and indeed you know what we want'*, he was left with no recourse save to express his sorrow and grief. He wished he had the strength to resist their attack, '*a mighty support*'—the right-minded man he had called out for, or a strong clan to come to his aid and repel them.

So, when he says, *'If only I had some power through you...'* he means

to say: 'If only I had some power because of you, by having a sensible man from among you join my side to defend against your attack.' And when he said, '*...or could take refuge in a mighty support*', he wished he had a strong clan that could prevent them from causing him harm. This reading of the verse is supported by its broader context.

It has also been suggested that when he said, *'If only I had some power through you...'* he meant to say, I wish I had the strength, the capability, and the numbers to stand up against you and protect my guests. In this reading, the phrase *bi-kum* ('through you') is read as meaning 'against you.'

Another explanation of the phrase, *'If only I had some power through you...'*, is that he wished he could stand up to them by himself, but this seems to be less consistent with the text of the verse than what we have propounded already.

It has also been proposed that Lot's statement in this verse addresses the guests rather than the people of the town. According to this reading, he said to his guests, 'I wish I had the strength to repel them for your sake.' But in this case, it's hard to understand the transition from addressing the people of his city to addressing the guests without there being any clear textual indication for this, which creates ambiguity and complications in the narrative, and this does not befit the eloquence of the Qur'an.

قَالُوا يَا لُوطُ إِنَّا رُسُلُ رَبِّكَ لَنْ يَصِلُوا إِلَيْكَ ۖ فَأَسْرِ بِأَهْلِكَ بِقِطْعٍ مِنَ اللَّيْلِ وَلَا يَلْتَفِتْ مِنْكُمْ أَحَدٌ إِلَّا امْرَأَتَكَ ۖ إِنَّهُ مُصِيبُهَا مَا أَصَابَهُمْ ۚ إِنَّ مَوْعِدَهُمُ الصُّبْحُ ۚ أَلَيْسَ الصُّبْحُ بِقَرِيبٍ ﴿٨١﴾

(11:81) *They said, 'O Lot, we are messengers of your Lord. They will never get at you* (lan yaṣilū ilayk). *Set out with your family in a watch of the night; and none of you shall turn round, except your wife; indeed she will be struck by what strikes them. Indeed their tryst is the dawn. Is not the dawn* (*already*) *near?'*

The phrase, *lan yaṣilū ilayk* ('they will never get at you') means that they will not obtain what they desire.

The verse shows that the situation had escalated to the point where the angels addressed Lot, revealing to him that they were not human beings, but angels who had been sent by God—'*we are the messengers of your Lord*'.

They comforted him by assuring him that the townspeople would not reach him or achieve what they desired. This aligns with the verse: *Certainly they even solicited of him his guests, whereat We blotted out their eyes* (54:37). God took away the sight of those who had crowded around his door with the intention to do evil, leaving them blind and stumbling in confusion.

Then the angels told Lot: '*Set out with your family in a watch of the night* (fa-asri bi ahlika bi qaṭaʿin min al-layl)*; and none of you shall turn round* (lā yaltafit min-kum aḥad).'

The verb *asri* (which is derived from the same root as *isrā'*) means to journey by night, and the phrase, '*in a watch of the night*' serves to make this meaning clear, with *qata'* (lit. 'piece') meaning 'during a one part of the night.' According to al-Rāghib, the verb *iltafat*, which is the Form VIII of the root *lafat*, meaning to be diverted from one's course. See, for instance, the words of Pharaoh's magicians to Moses, '*Have you come to us to turn us away* (li-talfita-nā) *from what we found our fathers following...?*' (10:78). Therefore, *lafat* means to turn one's face from one's direction; equally a woman can be said to have 'turned away' from her husband if she bears a child from a man other than him.

When the angels told Lot, '*Set out with your family in a watch of the night; and none of you shall turn round*', they were giving him instructions to keep himself and his nearest and dearest safe from the impending punishment that was about to descend upon the townspeople that very morning, and it conveys a sense of extreme urgency, as suggested by the following phrase, *Indeed their tryst is the dawn*.

Therefore, the meaning of this verse is: 'We are the messengers sent for the destruction of the townspeople, so save yourself and your family. You and your family must leave during a part of this night and depart from this place, as its people will be destroyed by God's punishment at dawn. There is not much time left until dawn and none of you should look back.'

Some commentators have suggested that 'looking back' means to be concerned for which property or belongings they should take with them and save from destruction or to delay their departure. However, neither of these readings should be given much consideration.

The phrase, '*... except your wife; indeed she will be struck by what strikes them ...*', appears to be an exception to the command to '*Set out with your family*', rather than to the prohibition, '*and none of you shall turn around*.'

The reason for this exception is explained by the statement, '*... she will be struck by what strikes them*.' Elsewhere, God says, '*... except his wife, We have ordained, will indeed be among those who remain behind*' (15:60).

Next, the angels say to Lot, '*Indeed their tryst is the dawn* (subḥ). *Is not the dawn near?*' In other words: 'Their punishment is due to descend at dawn'—which is at the very beginning of the morning, just as the sun starts to rise, as God indicates elsewhere: *So the Cry seized them at sunrise* (15:73).

The first of these two sentences—'*Indeed their tryst is the dawn*'—is an explanation of the phrase: '*Set out with your family in a watch of the night*.' This implies urgency, which is confirmed by the following sentence: '*Is not the dawn near?*' It is also possible that they said this because the prophet Lot was urging them to punish his people, and they responded by saying: '*Indeed their tryst is the dawn. Is not the dawn near?*' This means that it has been ordained that they shall be destroyed in the morning, and this is not a far-off time. Alternatively, the first sentence could be a sign of urgency from the angels, and the second sentence is a way to reassure Lot in his haste to see the punishment descend.

Note that the verses concerning the story of Lot do not specify their destination when they escaped from the city. God says elsewhere: '*Take your family in a watch of the night; and follow in their rear, and none of you should turn round, and proceed as you are bidden*' (15:65). It appears that the angels did not tell him his ultimate destination and left it to what would be revealed to him later through divine revelation.

فَلَمَّا جَاءَ أَمْرُنَا جَعَلْنَا عَالِيَهَا سَافِلَهَا وَأَمْطَرْنَا عَلَيْهَا حِجَارَةً مِنْ سِجِّيلٍ مَنْضُودٍ ﴿٨٢﴾ مُسَوَّمَةً عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ ۖ وَمَا هِيَ مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ بِبَعِيدٍ ﴿٨٣﴾

(11:82-83) ***So when Our edict came, We made its topmost part its nethermost, and We rained on it stones of laminar shale*** **(sijjīl manḍūd)*****, marked*** **(masmūm)** ***with your Lord, never far from the wrongdoers.***

The three occurrences of '*it*' (a feminine singular pronoun) in the verse refer to the people of Lot's land, town, or territory, as is indicated by the context. According to al-Ṭabrisī in *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, the adjective *sijjīl* is synonymous with *sijjīn*, meaning 'fired.' Al-Rāghib writes: '*Sijjīn* means stones mixed with clay. Some say it is a Persian loanword.' By this, he is

referring to the etymology of the Arabic word *sijjīn / sijjīl* being traced to the Persian compound *sang gil* ('clay stone'). Some have said that it comes from the Arabic root *sijil*, meaning 'inscription', in the sense that the destiny of these stones to punish the people of Lot was written aforehand. Others have said that it is derived from the verb *asjalat*, meaning 'sent.'

However, it appears that the original meaning of all these explanations is the Arabicized Persian compound *sang gil*, meaning 'stones and clay'. The term 'book' is also derived from it, as they used to write on clay-fired tablets, then the semantic range of this word expanded to mean any sort of inscription, even if it is made on paper. The meaning of 'sent' is derived from this as well.

Manḍūd ('layered') means to be arranged and ordered, while *masmūm* ('marked') means to identified by a mark or symbol.

Therefore, the meaning of the verse is: 'When Our edict for punishment came to pass...'—which is God's directive to the angels to execute their punishment, and that is the divine command "Be," as referred to in His saying, *All His command, when He wills something, is to say to it 'Be,' and it is* (36:82)—'...We made the high points of their land and their cities their lowest points by overturning them, and We rained down upon them stones of baked clay, arranged and marked in Your Lord's knowledge, so that none of them will miss the target for which they were intended.'

Some commentators have said that the punishment of being overturned seized those who were living in the land at the time, while the rain of stones punished those who were away. Others have said that it was the city itself that rained down as stones when Gabriel lifted it up to overturn it and bury it in the earth. Still others have said that the stones only rained down after the city was overturned in order to intensify the punishment of Lot's people. However, all of these interpretations are arbitrary and without any support in the text itself.

Note that in Sūrah al-Ḥijr God says, *So the Cry seized them at sunrise* (15:73). Therefore, the punishment of Lot's people consisted of a blast, the city being overturned, and stones being rained down upon them. Now, it is possible that these verses actually describe a volcanic eruption near the city, which would have produced a blast, and caused an earthquake that resulted in it being overturned, while also potentially raining down stones and volcanic debris on the people.

Turning to the last part of the final verse in this section, ... *never far from the wrongdoers*—some have said that the 'wrongdoers' in this verse refers to the wrongdoers of Mecca or the idolaters of the Prophet's own people. This statement is intended as a threat, meaning: 'these stones are not far from the wrongdoers of Mecca.' Alternatively it could mean that the physical location of these ruined cities is not far from the wrongdoers of Mecca, as they are situated on the path between Mecca and Syria, as per the verses: *And indeed, it is upon a path often frequented* (15:76), and: *And indeed you pass by them at dawn and at night. So do you not apply reason?* (37:137-138).

This reading is supported by the shift in address from God speaking in the first-person (in terms of 'We' and 'Our') to speaking to the Prophet about Himself in the third person ('your Lord'). It is as if God deviated from the expected expression, 'marked by us' to say 'marked by your Lord' in order to direct a warning to the Prophet's people, or to seize their attention and deliver a stronger rhetorical effect in the debate with them. However, it may also imply a general threat to all wrongdoers, meaning that the divine punishment represented by the rain of stones is never far from the wrongdoers, of whom the people of Lot are but one example. Even in this case, however, the use of the phrase *by your Lord* could also still be addressed to the wrongdoing idolaters of the Prophet's own people first and foremost.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *al-Kāfī*, al-Kulaynī narrates from Zakariyā b. Muḥammad (from his father), from ʿAmr, from Imām al-Bāqir: 'The people of Lot were some of the best people that God had created, so Satan pursued them vigorously. One of their virtuous practices was that the men would go out to work and leave their womenfolk behind. But Satan would not give up his hostility to them and, when they returned, he ruined what they had accomplished.

So the people of Lot said to one another: "Let us keep watch for the one who is ruining our belongings." So they kept watch and found that it was a young boy who was extremely handsome. They asked him, "Are you the one who keeps ruining our belongings?" They agreed among themselves to kill him, so they kept

him overnight with a guard. At night, the boy cried out, "What's wrong with you?" the guard asked, "I can only sleep when I'm lying on my father's belly." The man responded, "Come, sleep on my belly."

The boy kept caressing the man until he taught him how to commit a sinful act. Firstly, Satan had taught the boy, and secondly, the boy taught the man. Afterward, the boy escaped. The next morning, the man began to speak about what he had done with the boy. This was met with astonishment by the people who did not know about the act that the boy had committed, and they became curious about it. This led to the men satisfying themselves with each other. Then, they then began to ambush travellers in order to commit sinful acts with them. This caused people to abandon their city. Eventually, they also abandoned their women and turned entirely towards boys.

When Satan saw that he had successfully corrupted the men, he went to the women, transforming himself into a woman. He asked them, "Are your men satisfying themselves with each other?" They responded, "Yes, we have seen it." All the while, Lot was admonishing them and preaching to them, but Satan kept tempting them until the women began satisfying themselves with other women.

When the guilt against them was established, God sent Gabriel, Michael, and Raphael disguised as young boys, each wearing a turban. They passed by Lot while he was working the fields. He asked them, "Where are you going? I have never seen anyone more handsome than you!" They said, "We are the messengers of our master to the lord of this town." He asked, "Has your master not informed you about what the people of this town are doing? By God, they take men and abuse them until they are bloody." They replied, "Our lord master ordered us to pass through it." He said, "I have a request for you." They asked, "What is it?" He said, "Wait for me here until dusk."

So they sat and waited. He then sent his daughter with bread and water for them in a gourd, and a cloak to protect them from the cold. But when his daughter left, it began to rain and the valley flooded. Lot said, "The flood will sweep away the boys." He said to

them, "Let's get moving." Lot began walking along the base of the wall, while Gabriel, Michael, and Raphael walked in the middle of the road. Lot told them, "Walk over here, my sons." But they replied, "Our master commanded us to walk in the middle of the road." Lot was trying to make use of the cover of dark.

Satan passed by and stole a baby boy from a woman, then threw him in the well. The entire town started yelling at Lot's door. When they saw the boys in Lot's house, they said, "Lot, are you partaking in our deeds now?" He replied, "These are my guests, don't dishonor me in their regard." They said, "There are three of them, keep one and give us two." Lot took them into a room and said, "If only I had a household to protect me from you!"

They battered on the door until they broke in and threw Lot out. Then Gabriel said to him, "We are messengers of your Lord, they will not reach you." Gabriel took a handful of gravel, hit them in the faces and said, "Blind are the countenances." All the people of the town went blind. Lot then said to the angels, "O messengers of my Lord, what is your Lord's command concerning them?" They replied, "We were commanded to seize them for punishment at dawn." He said, "I have a request." They asked, "What is it?" He said, 'Take them now, for I fear that their sin might be exposed to my Lord." They said, "*Indeed their tryst is the dawn. Is not the dawn near* for those about to be taken*?* Take your daughters and go, leave your wife behind."'

Imām al-Bāqir added: 'May God have mercy on Lot. If he had known who was with him in the room, he would have known that he was destined to be victorious. He said, "*If only I had some power through you, or could take refuge in a mighty support!*" (11:80) But what support could be stronger than having Gabriel right there in the room with him? Then God told Muḥammad, '*... never far from the wrongdoers.*' (11:83) Meaning: 'The wrongdoers of your nation if they do what the people of Lot did.' The Prophet, said, 'Whoever pursues men will not die until men are called to him.'

Author's comment: The account in this narration is somewhat confused. It says three angels were sent, but other narrations—such as the one we cited from Abū Yazīd al-Ḥammār, from Imām al-Ṣādiq, in the previous

section—says that there were four including Kerubiel. Some Sunni narrations state they were three: Gabriel, Michael, and Raphael. The narration also suggests that Lot's words '*If only I had some power through you...*', were addressed to the angels, not the people, whereas it is clear from our analysis of the verses that Lot was speaking to his people.

As for his saying, 'May God have mercy on Lot. If he had known...', this is similar in meaning to the narration attributed to the Prophet: 'May God have mercy on Lot, he would have taken refuge in a mighty support...'

As for his saying, 'Then God told Muḥammad', this correlates with what we said earlier about the possibility of the phrase *never far from the wrongdoers* being intended as a warning to the Quraysh.

(2) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, it is narrated via a chain from Abū Baṣīr, from Imām al-Ṣādiq, about the verse, '*and We rained on it stones of laminar shale, marked ...*' (11:82–83): 'There is no servant who leaves this world who considers the behavior of Lot's people permissible save that God will pelt him with one of those stones, and it will be his final end, but no one will see it.'

Author's comment: It is also narrated in *al-Kāfī*, via a chain of narrators from Maymūn al-Bān, from the Imām: 'Whoever persists in the sin of Lot's people will not die until he is pelted by one of those stones, and it will be his final end, but no one will see it.'

Both of these traditions suggest that the verse, *never far from the wrongdoers*, is not specific to the Quraysh, and that this punishment is spiritual rather than physical.

(3) In *al-Kāfī*, al-Kulaynī narrates from Yaʿqūb b. Shuʿayb, from Imām al-Ṣādiq, about Lot's saying, '*... these are my daughters: they are purer for you*': 'He proposed that they should marry them.'

(4) In *al-Tahdhīb*, al-Ṭūsī narrates from Imām al-Riḍā: Regarding a man approaching a woman from behind, he said: 'It is made permissible by a verse from the book of God when Lot says, *these are my daughters: they are purer for you*, when He knew that they did not desire vaginal intercourse.'

(5) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Abū al-Shaykh reports that ʿAlī delivered a sermon in which he said: 'A man's clan's support for him is better than a man's support for his clan, for if he withholds his hand from them, he holds back only one hand, while a clan can

keep many hands away from a man, along with their love, protection, and support. Perhaps one man becomes angry with another, and he does not know him except by his lineage (and that is all that prevents him from doing harm to him). I will recite to you from that verses of the Book of God.' Then he recited this verse: '*If only I had some power through you, or could take refuge in a mighty support!*'

Ali continued: 'The mighty support mentioned in this verse is the clan, but Lot did not have a clan. I swear by the one there is no God but Him, God did not send a prophet after Lot, except amongst an abundance of his own people.'

Author's comment: The end of the narration is reported through Sunni and Shia chains of narration.

(6) In *al-Kāfī*, al-Kulaynī narrates a tradition from Abū Yazīd al-Ḥammār from Imām al-Bāqir, which we cited in the previous section. In it, we read: 'The angels came to Lot while he was farming near the town. They greeted him while they were disguised. When he saw their handsome appearance—they wore white clothes and white turbans—he asked them: "Will you stay in my home?" They replied: "Yes." So, he led them and they walked behind him. He regretted inviting them to his home and said: "What have I done? I brought them to my people, knowing full well what they are like." He told them: "Indeed, you have come to the worst of God's creation." Gabriel said to the other angels: "We will not hasten God's punishment upon them until he testifies against them three times." Then he said: "This makes one." He walked for a while, then turned to them and said: "Indeed, you come to the worst of God's creation." Gabriel said: "That makes two." Then he walked until he reached the city gate, he turned to them and said: "Indeed, you come to the worst of God's creation." Gabriel said: "That is the third." Then he entered and they entered with him until they reached his house.

When his wife saw them, she beheld their handsome appearance and climbed onto the roof. She clapped, but the people didn't hear her. So, she started a fire, and when they saw the smoke, they rushed to the door until they reached it. She came down to them

and said: "We have people, I have never seen people with a more handsome appearance." They came to the door to enter.

When Lot saw them, he stood up and said to them: "*Be wary of Allah and do not humiliate me with regard to my guests. Is there not a right-minded man among you?*" (11:78) Then he said: "*these are my daughters: they are purer for you*." He called them all to what is lawful. They said: "*You certainly know that we have no interest in your daughters, and indeed you know what we want.*" He said to them: "*If only I had some power through you, or could take refuge in a mighty support!*" Gabriel said: "If only he knew the power he has!"

The people massed until they forced their way in through the door. Gabriel shouted at them and said: 'O Lot, let them in.' When they entered, Gabriel pointed his finger at them and their eyes were blinded. This is what God Almighty said: *whereat We blotted out their eyes* (54:37). Then Gabriel called him and said to him: "*we are messengers of your Lord. They will never get at you*." He advised him to leave with his family in a portion of the night. Gabriel said to him: "We have been sent for their destruction." He said: "O Gabriel, hurry." He said: "Indeed, their appointment is the morning. Is not the morning near?"

He was commanded to take whoever was with him except his wife. Then he, Gabriel, uprooted the city from the seven earths with his wing. Then he raised it until the inhabitants of the lowest heaven heard the howling of its dogs and the crowing of its roosters. Then he turned it over and rained stones of baked clay upon it and upon those around it.

Author's comment: The final part of the narration, which includes the city being uprooted from seven earths and then raised to the point where the inhabitants of the lowest heaven could hear the barking of its dogs and the crowing of its roosters, is an extraordinary event. While such an event is not beyond God's omnipotent power, this type of narration, which is isolated and not widely reported, does not suffice as proof of its occurrence.

Indeed, the divine norm is that miracles and extraordinary events are meant to serve a purpose. What wisdom could there be in raising them to such an extent, if it had no impact on the people of Lot's punishment

or its severity?

Some theologians have said that such extraordinary and supernatural events could be seen as an act of divine kindness (*lutf*), insomuch as the reporting of such events through the infallible prophets can draw believers closer to obedience and deter them from sin. This is a valid point, as the creation of magnificent, awe-inspiring events and phenomena that defy ordinary expectations can strengthen the faith of believers and serve as a lesson for those who heed such warnings. However, such divine kindness only applies when the event is perceived through sensory experience or any other form of empirical knowledge. A solitary or weak narration that lacks authoritative support should not be given any consideration. The occurrence of supernatural events or extraordinary incidents simply to provide a lesson or invoke fear is pointless if it doesn't reach people, and there is no rationale for intensifying the punishment of one group as a lesson for others except in the practices of ignorant tyrants and oppressors.

In his commentary on the Qur'an, *al-Manār*, Rashīd Riḍā writes: 'One of the mythical accounts that commentators have taken from Judeo-Christian traditions is that Gabriel uprooted the city with his wing from the edge of the earth, and ascended with it to the zenith of the sky until the inhabitants of the heavens heard the sounds of dogs and chickens in it, then he overturned it completely, making the highest part its lowest.

This imaginary account is based on the belief that celestial bodies inhabited by living beings are within reach of the inhabitants of earth and its creatures, and that they remain alive. However, it has been scientifically proven by observation and actual testing in our current era that aircraft and balloons that are created to function in the atmosphere can reach a point where the air pressure is low, and human life becomes impossible there. They are also manufacturing types of these aircraft which are supplied with enough oxygen for breathing and sustaining life in the upper layers of the atmosphere.

The Glorious Book, the Qur'an, has referred to the impact of ascending into the atmosphere on breathing difficulty, as it can cause chest constriction. As stated in the verse: *Whomever Allah desires to guide, He opens his breast to Islam, and whomever He desires to lead astray, He makes his breast narrow and straitened as if he were climbing into the heavens* (6:125).

Now, one might argue that the act attributed to Gabriel in the narrative

is rationally possible, and its occurrence is an exception to normal occurrences, then it isn't appropriate to require belief in it to hinge upon known laws of nature.

To this I would respond: Yes, however, the first condition for accepting a narrative about an event that goes against the norms and laws God has set up to organise the world, concerning both its construction and destruction, is that the narrative must have come from divine revelation and been transmitted either through continuous testimony from an infallible source, or through an authentic chain of narration without anomalies or flaws at the very least. Yet, this has not been mentioned in God's book, there is no reported tradition from His Prophet about it, and God's wisdom does not appear in it—it has only been reported by some of the generation of the Successors, not the Companions of the Prophet. Without a doubt, it is taken from Judeo-Christian sources.

Another claim made by people is that the inhabitants of the city were four million in number, yet all of Palestine wouldn't hold this number of people, so how were these millions of people living among those four towns?'

As for what Rashīd Riḍā says about the tradition being narrated by the Successors rather than the Companions, a tradition with the same meaning is actually narrated from both Ibn ʿAbbās and Hudhayfa b. al-Yamān. In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, al-Suyūṭī transmits Ibn ʿAbbās' narration from Isḥāq b. Bishr and Ibn ʿAsākir, via Juwaybar and Muqātil from al-Ḍaḥḥāk, from him: 'When dawn broke, Gabriel turned to the towns of Lot—with their men, women, fruits, and birds—enclosed and folded them, then uprooted them from the surface of the earth. He carried them under his wing and raised them to the lowest heaven—so that its inhabitants could hear the barking of dogs and the birds, and the cries of the women and men under Gabriel's wing—then he overturned the town and cast it down, following it with a rain of stones. The stones were for the shepherds and merchants and anyone else outside their towns.'

Meanwhile, in the narration from Hudhayfa b. al-Yamān, al-Suyūṭī narrates it in *al-Durr al-Manthūr* from ʿAbd al-Razzāq, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn al-Mundhir, and Ibn Abī al-Ḥātim from him. It reads: 'Gabriel asked permission to destroy them, and he was granted permission. He carried the ground they were on and hovered with it until the inhabitants of the

nearest heaven could hear the barking of their dogs, then he ignited a fire beneath them and turned it over with them. Lot's wife heard the sound while she was with Lot, so she turned back and the punishment struck her, and those inhabitants of the city who were travelling abroad were pursued by stones.'

As for the Successors, traditions with this meaning were narrated from Saʿīd b. Jubayr, Mujāhid, Abū Ṣāliḥ, Muḥammad b. Kaʿb al-Quraẓī, and something even more intense from al-Sudayy, who recounted: 'When they awoke, Gabriel descended and uprooted the ground from the seven earths, then carried it until he reached the lowest heaven, then Gabriel cast it down to the earth.'

As for Rashīd Riḍāʿs claim that for a narrative to be accepted, it must have 'been transmitted either through continuous testimony from an infallible source, or through an authentic chain of narration without anomalies or flaws', this is a matter of legal theory. The current consensus on the matter is that if a report is continuously transmitted or supported by conclusive evidence, there is no reason to doubt its authoritativeness. However, no other reports are considered authoritative unless they pertain to matters of jurisprudence and law, in which case the report is treated as credible based on specific probable knowledge and, as such, is authoritative.

This is because religious authoritativeness (*ḥujjiyya sharʿiyya*) is a rational convention, which follows from the practical relevance of topic in which there can be religious legislation and authority. In historical issues and matters of faith, there is no sense in establishing any authority, as they do not have any practical religious impact. There is no sense in the legislator deeming ignorance as knowledge and making people blindly follow it. As for external matters, even if it is possible for them to have a religious impact, their effects are partial and religious legislation can only pertain to generalities. Detailed discussion on this matter should be sought from discussions of legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*, or 'the principles of jurisprudence').

(7) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Ibn Mardawayh cites Ubayy b. Kaʿb, who said: 'The Messenger of God said: "May God have mercy on Lot, for he would seek refuge in a mighty support."'

Author's comment: Given the circumstances under which Lot was confronting his people and advising them to fear God and abstain from immorality, and the apparent context of the verses describing the argument

between him and his people, it seems that Lot only wished for righteous supporters among his people or others. So, when he said, '... *or could take refuge in a mighty support*', he meant supporters other than his people, such as relatives, allies, or Godly friends who would help him protect his guests. This '*mighty support*' was, in fact, already with him in his house in the form of the angels Gabriel, Michael, and Raphael. Hence, they comforted him immediately after he uttered these words and said, '*O Lot, we are messengers of your Lord. They will never get at you.*'

Lot would not neglect his Lord under any circumstances or forget that all the assistance that comes to him is from Him, let alone to the point of forgetting Him and wishing for a helper other than Him. Far be it from such a noble prophet to be associated with such reprehensible ignorance. God Almighty has said about him: *We gave judgement and knowledge to Lot, ... and We admitted him into Our mercy. Indeed he was one of the righteous.* (21:75).

So, the Prophet's statement, '... for he would seek refuge in a mighty support', means that Gabriel and the rest of the angels were already with him, but he was unaware of this. It does not mean that God was with him, and he was ignorant of his Lord's status.

As for what some narratives report, namely that what the Messenger of God said implied that what he meant by '*a mighty support*' is God, glorified is He, rather than the angels, is due to how some narrators of the tradition have understood it. This is as reported from Abū Hurayra, who said: 'The Messenger of God said: "May God have mercy on Lot - he used to seek refuge in *a mighty support*," meaning God Almighty.'

Also from him via another route of transmission: 'The Prophet said: "May God forgive Lot—indeed, he used to seek refuge in a mighty support."' This report might be an instance of transmission of the meaning rather than the wording of a tradition, as the Prophet said, 'May God have mercy on Lot', but the narrator altered it to say, 'May God forgive Lot.' However, this suggests that Lot had neglected some manners of divine servanthood or committed a sin by misunderstanding his Lord's status or forgetting something that he should not have forgotten.

A Discourse on the Story of Lot

The story of Lot and his people in the Qur'an:

Lot was from Chaldea in the land of Babylon and was one of the first to believe in Abraham. He believed in him and said, '*Indeed I am migrating toward my Lord*' (29:26). So, God saved him along with Abraham and took them to the Holy Land, the land of Palestine (21:71), and Lot settled in one of its regions (which is the city of Sodom, as reported in historical chronicles, the Torah, and some narrations).

The people of the city and its surrounding towns—which God refers to in the Qur'an as *the towns that were overturned* (*al-mu'tafikāt*, 9:70)—worshipped idols and committed immoralities: sodomy, and they were the first people among whom it became widespread (7:80). They committed it in their gatherings without reservation (29:29), and the it persisted among them until it became a social norm, plaguing the majority of them. They abandoned women and engaged in highway robbery (29:29).

So God sent Lot to them (26:162). He called on them to fear God, to abandon indecency, and to return to the path of human nature. He warned and admonished them, but it only increased their defiance. Their only response was to say, 'Bring us God's punishment if you are truthful,' and they threatened to expel him from their town. They said to him, '*Lot, if you do not relinquish, you will surely be banished*' (26:167). They also said, 'a *Expel Lot's family from your town! They are indeed a puritanical lot.*' (27:56).

The Fate of Lot's People:

Lot continually called his people to God's path, to listen to their innate humanity, and to abandon indecency. However, they persisted in committing indecent acts until their rebelliousness became ingrained and the decree of punishment was justified came due for them. So, God sent messengers drawn from the ranks of His noble angels to destroy them. They first came to Abraham and informed him of God's command to destroy Lot's people. Abraham argued with them, hoping to spare them the punishment. He reminded them that Lot was among them, but they responded that they knew better about Lot and his family's situation, that God's decree had come, and that an irrevocable punishment was coming upon the people (29:32, 11:76).

They proceeded to Lot, appearing in the form of handsome young men. They came to him as guests, which distressed Lot because of what

he knew about his people and that they would certainly incline towards his guests. Before long, the people had heard about his visitors and they rushed to him in anticipation, attacking his house. He went out to them and preached intensely, trying to inspire their youth and guide them. He even offered his daughters to them, saying, *'O my people, these are my daughters: they are purer for you. Be wary of Allah and do not humiliate me with regard to my guests. Is there not a right-minded man among you?'* They replied that they had no interest in his daughters and that they would not be dissuaded his guests. Eventually, Lot despaired and said, *, 'If only I had some power through you, or could take refuge in a mighty support!'* (11:80).

The angels then said to Lot: '*we are messengers of your Lord*, so be at ease, for *they will never get at you.*' Then they blinded the people, leaving them groping and scattering (54:37).

After this, the angels commanded Lot to depart the city during the night with his family and follow them. They instructed him not to let anyone among them look back, except for his wife, because what would befall his people would also befall her—then they informed him that they would destroy his people at dawn (11:81, 15:66).

So the punishment seized the people at sunrise. God rained down stones of baked clay upon them, marked by your Lord for the wasteful. He turned their cities upside down and made the highest parts of their cities the lowest. He rescued the believers who were in the city, but found only one household of those who submit to God therein: that of Lot. And He left a sign therein for those who fear the painful punishment (51:37 and others).

The fact that only Lot's household believed and submitted to God and the fact that the divine punishment encompassed all of their cities indicates, firstly, that Lot's people were disbelievers, not believers. Secondly, that the immoral acts were not just prevalent among their men, because if that were the case and women were innocent of it, and if Lot was inviting people back to the natural way, some women would have undoubtedly followed him and gathered around him in belief. Yet, nothing about this is mentioned in the text.

This corroborates the narrations that immoral acts were prevalent among them, that men were only interested in other men for sodomy, and women were only interested in other women for tribadism.

Lot's Moral Character:

Lot was a messenger from God to the people of *the towns that were overturned* (al-mu'tafikāt, 9:70), which include Sodom and the cities surrounding it. Some reports say that there were four cities: Sodom, Gomorrah, Zeboim, and Admah. He shared all the spiritual ranks assigned to the noble prophets in the Qur'an.

Some of the special attributes ascribed to him in God's words are the following: *We gave judgement and knowledge to Lot, and We delivered him from the town which used to commit vicious acts. Indeed they were an evil and profligate lot. And We admitted him into Our mercy. Indeed he was one of the righteous.* (21:74).

Lot and His People in the Torah:

The Torah says that Lot was the son of Abram (Abraham)'s brother Haran, the son of Terah. Both Abram and Lot lived in Terah's house in Ur of the Chaldeans. Terah later migrated from Ur, heading for the land of the Canaanites, and settled in the town of Haran, where he lived with Abram and Lot until his death.

Subsequently, by God's command, Abram left Haran, taking Lot with him. Both of them had amassed substantial wealth and servants during their time in Haran. They then journeyed to the land of Canaan. Abram continually travelled towards the south, then he went to Egypt, and afterwards ascended from there southwards to Bethel where he settled.

Lot, who also journeyed with Abram, had his own sheep, cattle, and tents. However, the land was not capable of supporting them both, leading to a dispute between their herdsmen. Consequently, they decided to separate in order to prevent any further discord and disputes. Lot chose the Jordan valley and settled in the cities of the plain, moving his tents as far as Sodom. The inhabitants of Sodom were extremely wicked and sinful in the eyes of God. Abram, on the other hand, moved his tents and lived near the oaks of Mamre, which are in Hebron.

A war later ensued between the kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim, and Bela on one side, and four of their neighbors on the other. The king of Sodom and his allies were defeated in this war, with the enemy seizing all the possessions of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their provisions. Lot was taken captive along with all his possessions. When Abram heard of

this, he went out with his servants, numbering over three hundred, fought against them, and defeated them. He rescued Lot and all his possessions from captivity, restoring him to his former residence. This is a summary of what is in the Torah at the beginning of the story of Lot in the Torah.[1]

The Torah then recounts[2]: 'God appeared to Abram by the oaks of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance of his tent during the heat of the day. He lifted his eyes and saw three men standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the entrance of his tent to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. He said: "My lord, if I have found favor in your eyes, please do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought so you may wash your feet and rest under this tree. Let me fetch a morsel of bread so you may refresh yourselves, then you may continue on since you have come to your servant." They responded, "Do as you have said."

Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, "Quick, prepare three seahs of fine flour, knead it and make some bread." Then Abraham ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. He then brought curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under the tree.

They asked him, "Where is your wife Sarah?" He replied, "Here, in the tent." Then one said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son." Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. Abraham and Sarah were already very old, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, "After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?" Then the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?' Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son." Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, "I did not laugh." But he said, "Yes, you did laugh."

When the men got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way. Then the Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? Abraham will

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1 (Translator's note: See Genesis 13:1–12.)

2 (Translator's note: The following passage is Genesis 18:1–12 and 19:1–38)

surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him."

Then the Lord said, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know." The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the Lord. Then Abraham approached him and said: "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" The Lord said, "If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake."

Then Abraham spoke up again: "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes, what if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five people?" He said, "If I find forty-five there, I will not destroy it." Once again he spoke to him, "What if only forty are found there?" He said, "For the sake of forty, I will not do it." Then he said, "May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak. What if only thirty can be found there?" He answered, "I will not do it if I find thirty there." He said, "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, what if only twenty can be found there?" He said, "For the sake of twenty, I will not destroy it."

He said, "May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?" God answered, "For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it." When the Lord had finished speaking with Abraham, he left, and Abraham returned home.

The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city. When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground. "My lords," he said, "please turn aside to your servant's house. You can wash your feet and spend the night and then go on your way early in the morning." "No," they answered, "we

will spend the night in the square." But he insisted so strongly that they did go with him and entered his house. He prepared a meal for them, baking bread without yeast, and they ate.

Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old—surrounded the house. They called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we might *know* them." Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him and said, "No, my friends. Don't do this wicked thing. Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. But don't do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof."

"Get out of our way," they replied. "This fellow came here as a foreigner, and now he wants to play the judge! We'll treat you worse than them." They kept bringing pressure on Lot and moved forward to break down the door. But the men inside reached out and pulled Lot back into the house and shut the door. Then they struck the men who were at the door of the house, young and old, with blindness so that they could not find the door.

The two men said to Lot, "Do you have anyone else here—sons-in-law, sons or daughters, or anyone else in the city who belongs to you? Get them out of here, because we are going to destroy this place. The outcry to the Lord against its people is so great that he has sent us to destroy it." So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were pledged to marry his daughters. He said, "Hurry and get out of this place, because the Lord is about to destroy the city!" But his sons-in-law thought he was joking.

At dawn, the angels hurried Lot along, saying, "Get up! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished." When Lot hesitated, the men grabbed his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the Lord was merciful to them. As soon as they had brought them out, one of them said, "Flee for your lives! Don't look back, and don't stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!" But Lot said to them, "No, my lords, please! Your servant has found favor in your eyes, and you have shown great kindness to me in sparing my life. But I can't flee to the mountains; this disaster will overtake me, and I'll die. Look, there is a town near enough to run to, and it is small. Let me

flee to it—it is very small, isn't it? Then my life will be spared." He said to him, "Very well, I will grant this request too; I will not overthrow the town you speak of. But flee there quickly, because I can't do anything until you reach it." (That is why the town was called Zoara.)[1]

By the time Lot reached Zoar, the sun had risen over the land. Then the Lord rained down burning sulphur on Sodom and Gomorrah—from the Lord out of the heavens. He overthrew those cities and the entire plain, destroying all those living in the cities—and also the vegetation in the land. But Lot's wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.

Early the next morning Abraham got up and returned to the place where he had stood before the Lord. He looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah, toward all the land of the plain, and he saw dense smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace. So when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived.[2]

Author's comment: This is the account given in the Torah about Lot and his people. We have presented it in full to highlight its differences with the account in the Qur'an in several aspects.

For example, in this account, the angel sent with both good news and punishment are two, while the Qur'an refers to the messengers in plural, indicating at least three.

It also depicts Abraham's guests eating what he prepared and offered them, while the Qur'an denies that this took place, recounting that Abraham felt fear when he saw that their hands did not reach for the food.

In the Torah, Lot is explicitly given two daughters, while the Qur'an refers to them simply as 'daughters' in the plural. The Torah also details how the angels led Lot out of the city, the punishment of the people, and the transformation of Lot's wife into a pillar of salt, among other things that are not mentioned in the Qur'an.

The Torah's account attributes physicality directly to God, which is

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1 (Translator's note: Zoara—also Zoar and Tzo'ar—is a Hebrew word meaning "small one." In other words, the town owed its name to the fact it was of small size.)

2 (Publisher's note:) We have omitted the last part of this account in the Torah due to it being deemed inappropriate for most readers. However, the author's comment at the end suffices to give a hint of what was omitted.

in contrast to the Qur'an's emphasis on the divine transcendence. The Torah also depicts Lot laying with his daughters while drunk, while the Qur'an maintains the sanctity of its prophets and messengers, affirming they would not commit such acts that are not befitting of their holy status.

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Verses 84–95

The verses recount the story of Shuʿayb and his people, who were the inhabitants of Midian. They worshipped idols and engaged in the widespread practice of cheating in weights and measures, which led to extensive moral corruption amongst them. In response, God Almighty sent Shuʿayb. He summoned them to monotheism, called on them to deal fairly with weights and measures, to observe justice, and to avoid causing corruption in the land. He also brought them glad tidings of divine reward and warnings of divine punishment, and he was particularly earnest in his admonition to them. It has been narrated from the Prophet that Shuʿayb was 'the preacher of the prophets' (*khaṭīb al-anbiyā'*).

However, Shuʿayb's people only responded to his call with rejection and disobedience. They threatened to stone him or to drive him from their midst. They went to great lengths to persecute him and those few people who had believed in him. They tried to turn them away from the path of God and persisted in their ways until Shuʿayb called on God to judge between them. As a result, God Almighty destroyed them utterly.

وَإِلَىٰ مَدْيَنَ أَخَاهُمْ شُعَيْبًا ۚ قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مَا لَكُمْ مِنْ إِلَٰهٍ
غَيْرُهُ ۖ وَلَا تَنْقُصُوا الْمِكْيَالَ وَالْمِيزَانَ ۚ إِنِّي أَرَاكُمْ بِخَيْرٍ وَإِنِّي أَخَافُ
عَلَيْكُمْ عَذَابَ يَوْمٍ مُحِيطٍ ﴿٨٤﴾

(11:84) *And to Midian, Shuʿayb, their brother. He said, 'O my people! Worship Allah. You have no other god besides Him. Do not diminish the measure or the balance. Indeed I see that you are faring well, but I fear for you the punishment of an all-embracing day.'*

This follows on from the other the narratives of previous prophets and their nations recounted so far. Midian is the name of the city in which Shuʿayb's people lived. Thus, in saying that Shuʿayb's mission was to Midian, while, in fact, he was sent to its people, there is an element of figurative speech, like when we say, 'the gulley is running.' Furthermore, by

referring to Shuʿayb as their brother, it suggests that he belonged to them.

'O my people! Worship Allah. You have no other god besides Him ...'—we have already discussed the meaning of this.

'... Do not diminish the measure **(mikyāl)** ***or the balance*** **(mīzān)...'**—*Mikyāl* and *mīzān* are both nouns of instrument (*ism āla*) that denote 'what is measured with' and 'what is weighed with.' Note that it is neither the measure nor the balance themselves that are diminished, but rather it is, in fact, the items measured and weighed that are either diminished, increased, or proportionate relative to them. Therefore, speaking of 'diminishing' the measure or the balance themselves is another example of figurative speech.

The fact that God singles out cheating in weights and measures for mention amongst their sins indicates the prevalence of this practice amongst them, their penchant for it, and their excessiveness in it. The corruption it caused was apparent, and the adverse impact was clear. Therefore, it demanded serious attention from the bringer of truth who was sent to them, and he called on them to abandon this practice in particular out of all their sins.

When Shuʿayb says, '*... Indeed I see that you are faring well ...*', it means he can see that they are in good condition, which is a result of God's blessings on them, including wealth, abundant provision, low prices, and fertility. They did not need to cheat in weights and measures or steal insignificant things from people unjustly, wrongfully, and in contravention of the moral code. Therefore, his statement, '*Indeed I see that you are faring well*', explains why he said, '*Do not diminish the measure or the balance*.'

The term '*faring well*' could be generalized to mean that they were recipients of God's care, in that they were also blessed with intellect and good sense, and provided with sustenance. Therefore, there was no reason for them to worship deities other than Him, associate others with Him, or cause corruption on Earth by cheating in weights and measures. According to this reading, the phrase, , '*Indeed I see that you are faring well*', provides a rationale for all of Shuʿayb's previous statements '*Worship Allah...*' and '*Do not diminish the measure or the balance ...*' as well as his statement '*... but I fear for you the punishment of an all-embracing day*.'

The essence of Shuʿayb's statement, '*Indeed I see that you ...*', is that there are two deterrents that should prevent you from disobeying God:

the first is that you are in a state of wellbeing and have no need to resort to dishonestly taking people's wealth. The second is that behind the disobedience of God's command, there looms an all-embracing day, the punishment of which should be feared.

It is also not far-fetched to read his statement, *'Indeed I see that you are faring well'* (innī arākum bi-khayr) as meaning 'I look at you with a good outlook', meaning: 'I look at you with the eye of a compassionate and sincere adviser who only wants the best for you and wishes nothing but happiness for you.' In this light, his saying, '*but I fear for you the punishment of an all-embracing day*', can be seen as an empathetic explanation from his perspective.

'... but I fear for you the punishment of an all-embracing day **(yawm muḥīṭ)***'* refers to the Day of Judgement or the day when the divine punishment descends in this world. By describing a day of retribution or punishment as *muḥīt* implies that there is no escape from it, no refuge, and no sanctuary other than with God. No supporter or helper can ward off that day, nor will repentance or intercession avail anyone on it. The implication of encompassment means that the punishment is decisive and inescapable. The verse essentially warns people that disbelief and wickedness bring about an unavoidable punishment and Shu'ayb fears that this will befall his people.

وَيَا قَوْمِ أَوْفُوا الْمِكْيَالَ وَالْمِيزَانَ بِالْقِسْطِ ۖ وَلَا تَبْخَسُوا النَّاسَ أَشْيَاءَهُمْ
وَلَا تَعْثَوْا فِي الْأَرْضِ مُفْسِدِينَ ﴿٨٥﴾

(11:85) *'O my people! Observe fully the measure and the balance* **(awfū al-mikyāl wa al-mīzān)***, with justice, and do not cheat* **(lā tabkhasū)** *the people of their goods, and do not act wickedly on the earth, causing corruption.'*

Īfā' ('to observe fully') means to give a person their full due, and *bakhs* ('to cheat') means to diminish something. The words measure and balance are repeated for emphasis, calling people's attention to something upon which their society depends. Initially, he calls them to righteousness by forbidding them to reduce the measure and the weight. Then, he reiterates the command in a different form, namely bidding them to give the full measure and weight to others and not to deprive people of their due. This

signals that merely refraining from reducing the measure and the weight does not suffice in fulfilling this moral imperative. Not only should the person who measures and weighs give the full measure and weight, but they should also not deprive people of those things that are rightly theirs. This is so that they understand that, by being fair in weights and measures, they are returning to the people what is theirs and restoring their property to its rightful place.

As for his saying, '... *and do not act wickedly on the earth* (lā taʿthaw fī al-arḍ)*, causing corruption* (mufsidīn)', al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī says: '*al-ʿayth* and *al-athī* are closely related to one another in meaning, akin to *jadhab* and *jabadh*, save for the fact that *ʿayth* is usually used in relation to corruption that is physically tangible, while *ʿathī* is commonly used to denote corruption that can only be perceived mentally. Hence, '*and do not act wickedly on the earth, causing corruption*.'

Based on this, when Shuʿayb said: '*causing corruption*', this is an adverb for the pronoun in the verb *lā taʿthaw* (that is, the pronoun 'you' (pl.)), used for emphasis in the same manner as an absolute object, such as *lā tufisdū ifsādan*.

Therefore, the sentence '... *and do not act wickedly on the earth, causing corruption*', is a prohibition against causing corruption on earth, whether this is killing, wounding, or any form of wrongdoing, whether it concerns wealth, status, or family. However, it is plausible, based on the context, to read this statement as an exposition of the preceding prohibition, in which case it serves as a reinforcement of the prohibition on cheating and short-changing in measures and balances, as this is likewise a form of corruption on earth.

The reason for this prohibition is that the form of civil society that prevails amongst members of the human race is based on the principle of exchange and reciprocity. There is no connection or bond between two individuals from the human species that does not involve some form of give and take. Therefore, members of a society continuously cooperate in matters of life where one person assists another, expecting equal or exceeding benefits in return. This is the essence of transaction and exchange.

One of the most apparent examples of such exchanges are financial transactions, particularly those involving items with volume or weight that are sold by measure or by weight. This is one of the earliest forms of trade

humanity saw as necessary to implement in their daily lives.

Financial transactions, especially buying and selling, are pillars of human social life. Individuals estimate what they need in their essential lives by measurement or weight, and determine how much they should spend to purchase these things. Then, they navigate through life on the basis of these estimates and plans.

Now, if a person is dishonest in their business dealings and make their measures and weights are less than what they should be, unbeknownst to the other party, it disrupts the latter's life plans and invalidates his estimates. This destabilizes the order of his life from both aspects, as it diminishes the necessities of life he obtains through his purchases and increases the amount of his livelihood that he has struggled to earn that he must expend. This will deprive him of the foresight and planning necessary for him to live a good life, and he will stumble blindly on his way. This is the essence of corruption (*fasād*).

If this becomes widespread in a society, corruption proliferates among its members and they will soon lose trust in one another, which means they will no longer be able to depend or rely upon one another. As a result, security amongst them disintegrates. This is a catastrophe that encompasses both the good and the bad members of society, and affects both the one who gives people short measures in his dealings and the one who gives them their full due. Such a community transforms into a society based on deceit and the ruin of life rather than mutual cooperation and exchange for the sake of its betterment. This is why God says: *When you measure, observe fully the measure, weigh with an even balance. That is better and fairer in outcome* (17:35).

بَقِيَّتُ اللَّهِ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ إِن كُنتُم مُّؤْمِنِينَ ۚ وَمَا أَنَا عَلَيْكُم بِحَفِيظٍ ﴿٨٦﴾

(11:86) *'What remains of Allah's provision* (baqiyyat Allāh) *is better for you, should you be faithful, and I am not a keeper over you.'*

Baqiyyat literally means 'residual' or 'surplus', and it refers the profit a seller gains, which remains with him after the completion of the business transaction, which he can then use to cater to his own needs.

This is based on the principle of barter or exchange, which wasn't

originally based on profit-making, as each party would acquire something they needed in life through it. If one has an excess of what he needed, he would exchange his surplus for something else he needed but did not possess. Then, the practice of trading and exchanging goods for prices became a profession by which wealth could be acquired in its own right. A trader would acquire goods of one or various types and offer it to those in need for an exchange, adding a bit of profit to his initial capital in return for his efforts in gathering, transporting, and offering the goods. This is accepted by the buyers, as it facilitates their exchange, thus, a trader earns a legitimate profit from his trade, which is accepted by the community based on their natural disposition, enabling him to make a living and accumulate wealth for his own sustenance in the process.

The point is that the profit—which is a divine remainder (*baqiyya*)—that God has guided you towards through your innate disposition, is better for you than the wealth you acquire through unfair measures and short-changing in weight and measure, if indeed you are believers. This is because a believer benefits from wealth obtained through the lawful to which he has been guided by God. As for anything that is not accepted by God or not accepted by people based on their natural disposition (*fiṭra*), there is no good in it or any need for it.

Some have said that the stipulation of faith in the phrase, '*should you be faithful*', shows that one must have faith in order to understand this principle, not as a requirement in itself. In other words: 'if you are believers, you know the truth of my statement: "what remains from God is best for you."'

Others have suggested that the verse refers to the fact that the reward of obeying God—the 'remainder' meaning the everlasting reward of obedience—is better for you if you are believers. Ant there are other explanations suggested besides this.

'... and I am not a keeper over you'—this means that nothing that is within your power, whether it is your life, actions, obedience, sustenance, or blessings, is under my control. I am only a messenger, and my only responsibility is to deliver God's message to you. It is up to you to either choose what is best for you or to cast yourselves into perdition. I am not capable of bringing you any good or warding off from you any harm. This is akin to what God has said elsewhere: *This is indeed a reminder. So let*

anyone who wishes take the way toward his Lord. But you do not wish unless it is wished by Allah. Indeed Allah is all-knowing, all-wise (76:29-30).

قَالُوا يَا شُعَيْبُ أَصَلَاتُكَ تَأْمُرُكَ أَنْ نَتْرُكَ مَا يَعْبُدُ آبَاؤُنَا أَوْ أَنْ نَفْعَلَ فِي أَمْوَالِنَا مَا نَشَاءُ ۖ إِنَّكَ لَأَنْتَ الْحَلِيمُ الرَّشِيدُ ﴿٨٧﴾

(11:87) *They said, 'O Shuʿayb, does your worship require that we abandon what our fathers have been worshipping, or that we should not do with our wealth whatever we wish? You are indeed gentle and sensible.'*

This is the response that the people of Midian give to Shuʿayb's argument. Their statement is very carefully structured, and it appears that they are saying to him: 'We are free to choose our own religion and to manage our own wealth. You do not have the authority to command and prohibit us in accordance with your own likes and dislikes. If something you see in us displeases you because of your worshipping and your closeness to your Lord, and you wish to give commands and prohibitions, then do not go beyond your own self because you only have authority over yourself.'

They delivered this thought in an innovative manner, tinged with sarcasm and rebuke, which they presented in the form of a rhetorical question. Essentially, they are arguing that Shuʿayb's desire for them to abandon idol worship and stop managing their wealth as they please, is what his praying has prompted him to do. Yet, while his worship might control him, he and his worship do not control them. They insist they are free to choose their own religion and to manage their wealth as they please, without any restrictions being imposed. They have only adopted their fathers' religion and they only use their own wealth, for there is no restriction on a person concerning their property.

They ask him: 'Why, if your worship instructs you to do something, should we have to comply with that instruction?' In other words, 'What does it mean for your worship to command us to perform an action that we have to do without you? Is this not foolishness? After all, Shuʿayb, you are a measured and sensible person, who would not hastily chastise those he sees as wrongdoers or mete out punishments to those he views as criminals until he has thoroughly ascertained the truth of the matter. Equally, a sensible man would not embark on a course that would lead to error and

misguidance. So why have you taken such a foolish course action that can only result in foolishness and error?'

From this explanation, it becomes evident, first of all, that they attribute Shuʿayb's commands to his prayers only because these incite him to oppose their idolatry and their unfair business practices. This is why they ask, '... *does your worship require that we abandon ...*', rather than, 'does your worship prohibit you from worshipping what our fathers worshipped?' However, expressing prohibition by forbidding people from doing something sounds more natural than expressing it by commanding them to abandon it. That is why Shuʿayb says to them in response, '*I do not wish to oppose you by what I forbid you*', rather than 'that which I command you to abandon.' The aim, in any case, is to have them desist from idol worship and dishonesty. Understand this, for it is one of the subtleties of this verse, which is exceedingly eloquent and fine in its expression.

Second, it becomes evident that they only said, '... *that we abandon what our fathers have been worshipping ...?*' instead of saying, '... that we abandon our gods ...?' or '... that we abandon our idols ...?', to indicate that their argument is that these idols have been worshipped by our forefathers for generations, and they represent a traditional practice for us. Therefore, they argue, there is no harm in following a tradition inherited from past generations and nurtured by each succeeding one. Thus, we worship our gods and persist in our religion, which is the religion of our forefathers, and in doing so we preserve a well-established tradition within our community.

Third, it becomes evident that when they said, '... *or that we should not do with our wealth whatever we wish?*' they wanted to highlight the fact that this wealth was their property, hinting at their argument. In short: When something is a person's property, there is no doubt that they should have the right to dispose of it as they see fit, and nobody else who acknowledges their ownership has the right to object to their doing so. Every individual has the right to navigate through life and manage their property as best as they can, guided by their own intelligence and acumen.

Fourth, their statement, '... *does your worship require ...? You are indeed gentle and sensible*', is spoken out of mockery and derision. The mockery lies in their linking Shuʿayb's own worship to their giving up what their forefathers had worshipped before them and attributing this command solely to his own worship. However, the attribution of forbearance and

good sense to him is not done mockingly or derisively. Therefore, they emphasized the phrase, '*You are indeed gentle and sensible* (inna-ka la-anta al-ḥalīm al-rashīd)', with the particle of emphasis (*inna, la*) and the definite article (*al-*) in the form of a nominal sentence to strengthen their affirmation of his forbearance and wisdom. This makes their rebuke and rejection of him more powerful, suggesting it was inappropriate for one who was so forbearing and sensible to engage in such foolish behavior or to infringe on other people's freedom and independence in their own feelings and intentions.

Thus, it is clear that the claim made by some commentators, that Shuʿayb's people described him as forbearing and wise only out of mockery, intending to attribute the opposite qualities of ignorance and waywardness to him, is not correct.

قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُ عَلَىٰ بَيِّنَةٍ مِنْ رَبِّي وَرَزَقَنِي مِنْهُ رِزْقًا حَسَنًا ۚ
وَمَا أُرِيدُ أَنْ أُخَالِفَكُمْ إِلَىٰ مَا أَنْهَاكُمْ عَنْهُ ۚ إِنْ أُرِيدُ إِلَّا الْإِصْلَاحَ مَا
اسْتَطَعْتُ ۚ وَمَا تَوْفِيقِي إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ ۚ عَلَيْهِ تَوَكَّلْتُ وَإِلَيْهِ أُنِيبُ ﴿٨٨﴾

(11:88) *He said, 'O my people! Have you considered, should I stand on a manifest proof from my Lord, who has provided me a good provision from Himself? I do not wish to oppose you in what I forbid you. I only desire to put things in order, as far as I can, and my success lies only with Allah: in Him I have put my trust, and to Him I turn penitently.*

By saying that he is upon '*a manifest proof*' from his Lord means that he has a clear sign, which is the sign of prophethood and the miracle that indicates the truthfulness of the prophet's claim to be a prophet. When he says that God has granted him '*a good provision*', this means that God has granted him the revelation of prophethood, which contains the principles of religious teachings and laws. The meaning of these two phrases has already been discussed earlier.

Therefore, the meaning of the verse is: 'Tell me, if I am a messenger from God to you, and if He has favored me by revealing to me religious teachings and laws, and supported me with a clear sign that demonstrates the truthfulness of my claim, then am I foolish in my view? Is what I

am calling you to a foolish plea? Does it involve my imposing my own authority over you or stripping you of your freedom? It is God who owns everything, and you are not free in relation to Him; rather, you are His servants, He commands you as He wills. He is the ruler, and to Him you shall surely return.'

When Shuʿayb says, '*I do not wish to oppose you in what I forbid you* (ilā mā anhā-kum ʿan-hu)...', he uses the preposition *ilā* (lit. 'to') after the verb '*oppose*' to link it to a second object, which is what he opposes them in (i.e. '*what I forbid you*'), conveying the meaning of being inclined towards it. Therefore, the meaning is: 'I do not wish to oppose you by inclining towards what I forbid you from', or 'I do not wish to incline towards what I forbid you from, in opposition to you.'

This sentence is a response to their accusation that he wants to strip them of their freedom in their actions, to subjugate them, and to impose control over them. The upshot is that if he had wanted that, he would have opposed them in what he forbids them from. Since he does not want to oppose them, he does not want what they accused him of; rather, he wants to bring about reform to the greatest extent to which he is able.

To clarify: although the divine act of creation has endowed human beings with free will in their actions, and they are free to incline in their actions towards either doing or not doing, this freedom is complete in relation to other members of their species who share their likeness in creation. They have what he has, and they bear what he bears. So, no one has the right to impose control over another according to their own whim.

However, humans are inherently social creatures, and their life needs can only be fulfilled in a community of individuals of the same species, where everyone cooperates to meet everyone else's needs. Then, everyone specializes according to their own position in society. It is self-evident that a society cannot function without rules and laws, and a government managed by some of its members to preserve order and implement laws in accordance with the community's interests.

Therefore, it is inevitable that society members must surrender some of their freedom in return for the existence of such laws and customs, and refrain from acting recklessly, in order to attain some of their desires and preserve the remaining portion of their freedom.

In a societal context, an individual doesn't have absolute freedom

regarding critical matters that affect the common good and the overall wellbeing of society. When a government regulates these matters through policy and legislation, this is not a matter of enslavement or subjugation. Instead, it is about regulating those aspects of society where individuals do not have complete freedom.

Similarly, if an individual among the society sees actions from their fellow citizens that could harm their society or impair its wellbeing, thus invalidating their common and fundamental interests, he is moved to advise them towards a path of good sense. He commands them to do what's necessary and prohibits them from what should be avoided. This individual is not acting out of self-interest or subjugating the free citizens of his people. There is no freedom when it comes to the common good and necessary rules in their society. The commands and prohibitions he delivers to them are not truly his but arise from the demands of the aforementioned interests and inhere in society in the broadest sense of the term. The one who delivers the commands and prohibitions is merely a messenger, nothing more.

The evidence for this is when the messenger himself acts on what he commands and refrains from what he forbids without contradicting his words with his actions. Since humans naturally strive to preserve their benefits and care for their interests, if there is good in what he calls others to do, and he is a participant with them, he won't contradict himself. He won't leave for himself what he deems good for others. That's why Shuʿayb says in his response to his own people: '*I do not wish to oppose you in what I forbid you.*' Furthermore, to emphasise this point and remove any remaining doubt, he tells them, *I do not ask you any reward for it; my reward lies only with the Lord of all the worlds* (26:180).

Therefore, by saying, '*I do not wish to oppose you …*', Shuʿayb intends to say that whatever he prohibits them from is for the wellbeing of their society, of which he himself is a member. Therefore, everyone must observe these ordinances and adhere to them, but this is not tantamount to tyranny or something he has concocted from his own desires. That is why he says, '*I only desire to put things in order, as far as I can.*'

In summary, when they heard Shuʿayb calling them to abandon idol worship and fraud, they rejected his call, saying that what he proposed was contrary to their human freedom, which allowed them to worship whoever

they wanted and do whatever they wished with their wealth.

Shuʿayb responded to them by saying that what he invites them to does not originate from himself in a way that contradicts their freedom or invalidates their independence in their feelings or free will. Instead, he is a messenger from their Lord to them, and he has clear evidence of this. What he has brought to them is from God, who owns them and everything else and they are His servants, and this means they have no freedom or choice in relation to Him, nor do they have a choice in what He wants from them.

As for the message he delivered to them, which concerns the prosperity of their community and their personal happiness in this world and the Hereafter, an indication of this is that he does not want to contradict them on what he forbids them from. Rather, he is like them in doing so. He only aims to reform as much as he can and does not seek any reward for himself from them for this, as his reward lies only with the Lord of the Worlds.

When Shuʿayb says, '... *and my success lies only with Allah: in Him I have put my trust, and to Him I turn penitently*', he does so in the context of denying any capability to himself. As he already mentioned that he intends to reform their community with beneficial knowledge and good deeds to the extent of his ability, affirming for himself capability and power. However, the servant's freedom and power is nothing without God. He concludes by confessing his own inadequacy and deficiency by saying, '... *and my success lies only with Allah ...*', which means: 'Whatever I can accomplish through my ability in managing your affairs and securing the means to guarantee your happiness, all of this is only from God. He is indispensable, and there is no escape from His grasp, and no independence from Him. He is the one who granted me whatever capability I have. He is the one who aligns the external causes by means of my ability. Therefore, both my ability and success are from Him.'

Shuʿayb expounded this truth, and acknowledged that his success derived from God. This is a consequence of Him being the Creator of every soul, its Preserver, and the One who holds every soul accountable for what it has earned. This is as stated in the verses: *All praise belongs to Allah, originator of the heavens and the earth* (35:1); *... and your Lord is watchful over all things* (34:21); *Is He who sustains every soul by what it earns* (13:33); *Indeed Allah sustains the heavens and the earth lest they should fall apart ...* (35:41).

The upshot is that He is the one who originated things, their deeds, the links between them, and brought them into existence. He preserves all things and maintains their effects and prevents the links between them from disappearing and vanishing into nothingness.

This, in turn, necessitates that He is the trustee of everything in managing its affairs. They are dependent upon Him in their realization and the realization of the links between them, because He encompasses them, is dominant over them, and with that, they are linked to that thing by His leave.

Therefore, it is necessary for the servant who knows the status of his Lord, and recognizes this truth, to put this knowledge into practice by relying on his Lord and turning back to Him. That's why when Shuʿayb mentioned that his success is from God, he followed this by demonstrating his reliance and turning towards God, and said: '*... in Him I have put my trust, and to Him I turn penitently*.'

A Digression on the Meaning of Human Freedom of Action

A human being, by nature, possesses awareness (*shuʿūr*) and will (*irāda*), and has the freedom to choose for themselves what they want to do. In other words, they can decide which actions to take or not take. Every possible action that is presented to them depends on their nature and their own free will. They are naturally positioned to choose between action and inaction. They are obliged to choose one or the other, but they are free to decide on the actions that are attributed to them and originate from them by their own volition. Because of their innate nature (*fiṭra*), they have free rein when it comes to action and inaction and are not restricted or bound by anything. This is the meaning of human freedom.

A corollary of this existential freedom is a moral freedom that guides them in their social life. It allows them to choose their own way of life and to work as they please. No other member of their kind has the right to dominate or subjugate them, or to control their will and actions, forcing their own desires upon them against their will. Every individual of the species has the same innate freedom as others. As stated in the verse of the Qur'an: *and that we will not take each other as lords besides Allah* (3:64), and the verse: *It does not behove any human that ... he should say to the people, 'Be my servants instead of Allah'* (3:79).

This is the status of the human individual in relation to his peers. However, when compared to the universal laws and cosmic system of cause and effect that have produced human nature, humans do not have freedom. These forces dominate and surround them from all sides, turning them one way then the other. It is these forces, by their creation and command, that have shaped humans as they are, with no choice in their condition. Humans are as these forces have determined, not as they themselves have desired. Even human's elective actions, which are the field of human freedom, obey these forces to the extent they permit. Not everything a human likes or wants becomes a reality, and not every choice they make is realized for them. This is obvious.

These laws and causes have furnished humans with faculties that remind them of their needs and deficiencies. They propel them towards actions that lead to their happiness and the fulfilment of their needs and wants, such as the need for food, where hunger and thirst guide them to bread and water to achieve satiation and hydration, and so forth with all the mechanisms within their existence.

Furthermore, these laws and causes have imposed a moral obligation on individual humans to pursue actions that have realistic benefits that they cannot deny or overlook, such as eating, drinking, seeking shelter, protection from heat and cold, and defence against anything that threatens to harm them.

Then they were also instilled with an innate desire for social life, obligating them to establish domestic and civil society, and to cooperate and interact. This, in turn, forces them to sacrifice some aspects of their freedom from two aspects:

The first is that a society cannot function without the individual affording others reciprocal respected rights. They, in turn, offer him rights that they respect. He should work for people as they work for him, benefiting them as much as he benefits from them. He should abstain from acting or making decisions solely based on his preferences, respecting others' freedoms. Some of his freedom is thus sacrificed to ensure the freedom of others.

The second is that society cannot stand firm without norms and laws that its members, or the majority thereof, adhere to. These norms and laws should secure their general benefits, depending on the society's quality of

life. Such norms and laws protect their broader societal interests.

It is understood that respect for these norms and laws means sacrificing some freedom. Whoever establishes a norm or enacts a law—whether they're a simple majority of the people, their delegates, the ruler, or God and His messenger—restricts some of the people's freedom to preserve the rest of it. As God Almighty said, '*Your Lord creates whatever He wishes and chooses. They have no choice.* (28:68), and *A faithful man or woman may not, when Allah and His Messenger have decided on a matter, have any option in their matter, and whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger has certainly strayed into manifest error* (33:36).

In summary, a person is only free compared to others only to the extent that they can follow their own whims. However, when it comes to securing the fundamentals of human wellbeing, particularly those that pertain to the wellbeing of society at large, or the necessities imposed by the cosmic order of cause and effect, they are not free at all. Furthermore, promoting norms or actions in line with human wellbeing—whether this is through the law and the one who enforces it, or through a person giving moral guidance to others out of their own desire to do good and on the basis of clear evidence—does not constitute tyrannical control or a curtailment of basic human freedoms.

Furthermore, the aforementioned system of cause and effect and the principles of human wellbeing which it gives rise to align with God's will or permission, as expounded by the Islamic doctrine of monotheism. God is the absolute owner, and everything besides Him belongs to Him. Man's ultimate role is servanthood. This principle of absolute ownership removes any perceived freedom in relation to God, while granting relative freedom in relation to to others. As God says, *that we will worship no one but Allah, and that we will not ascribe any partner to Him, and that we will not take each other as lords besides Allah* (3:64).

Thus, God is the absolute ruler who must be obeyed unconditionally. As it is said, *Sovereignty belongs only to Allah* (12:40). He has given the right to command, prohibit, and demand obedience to His messengers, those in authority, and the believers of the Islamic nation. Therefore, there is no freedom against the truth they bring and call for. As God Almighty says, *Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those vested with authority among you* (4:59), and *But the faithful, men and women, are comrades of*

one another: they bid what is right and forbid what is wrong (9:71).

Commentary continues:

وَيَا قَوْمِ لَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شِقَاقِي أَنْ يُصِيبَكُمْ مِثْلُ مَا أَصَابَ قَوْمَ نُوحٍ أَوْ قَوْمَ هُودٍ أَوْ قَوْمَ صَالِحٍ ۚ وَمَا قَوْمُ لُوطٍ مِنْكُمْ بِبَعِيدٍ ﴿٨٩﴾

(11:89) *And 'O my people, do not let your defiance* (shiqāq) *toward me lead you* (yajrimanna-kum) *to be visited by the like of what was visited on the people of Noah, or the people of Hūd, or the people of Ṣāliḥ, and the people of Lot are not distant from you.'*

According to al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, the verb *jarm* (from whence *yarjimanna-kum* is derived) originally meant to cut the fruit from the tree but came to be used figuratively to denote every ill act. Meanwhile, *shiqāq* ('defiance') denotes oppositionality and antagonism. Therefore, the meaning of Shuʿayb's statement is: Beware that your opposition and hostility towards me, on account of my message, does not bring down upon you a calamity similar to the one that befell the people of Noah, which is drowning, or the people of Hūd, which is the barren wind, or the people of Ṣāliḥ, which is the cry and the quake.

His statement, '*and the people of Lot are not distant from you*', suggests that there is not a significant gap between their time and your time. The temporal gap between the two peoples was less than three centuries, as Lot was contemporary with Abraham, while Shuʿayb was contemporary with Moses.

It has been suggested that '*are not distant*' signifies geographic distance, pointing out that their ruined towns are near you due to the proximity of Midian to Sodom, which is in the Holy Land. So, the meaning is: 'The location of Lot's people is not far from you; you can see their sunken cities and their visible remaining ruins.' However, the context does not support this reading, which goes against the grain of the text without any evidence to justify it.

وَاسْتَغْفِرُوا رَبَّكُمْ ثُمَّ تُوبُوا إِلَيْهِ ۚ إِنَّ رَبِّي رَحِيمٌ وَدُودٌ ﴿٩٠﴾

(11:90) *'Plead with your Lord for forgiveness, then turn to Him*

***penitently. My Lord is indeed all-merciful** (**raḥīm**), **all-affectionate** (**wadūd**).'*

This has been previously discussed, the meaning of His saying: '*Plead with your Lord for forgiveness, then turn to Him penitently*' is to seek forgiveness from God for your sins and return to Him in faith in Him and His Messenger. Indeed, God is merciful and loving, He shows mercy to the repentant who seek forgiveness and He loves them.

Note that the first thing Shuʿayb says is '*Plead with your Lord for forgiveness*', in which he attributes God to them as '*your Lord*' (*rabba-kum*). Then, in the context of providing a rationale for this exhortation, he says, '*My Lord is indeed all-merciful, all-affectionate*', where he attributes God to himself as '*my Lord*.' Perhaps the reason for this is that, when he bids them to plead for forgiveness and turn to God, He wishes to call attention to God's status of lordship (*rubūbiyya*) over them, because it is God's lordship that relates to acts of worship, including seeking forgiveness and repentance. Then he referred to God as their Lord ('*your Lord*') to emphasise this relationship and to show them that God alone is their Lord, and not those beings they take as lords besides Him.

Now, in this context, it might seem to have been more appropriate to say 'Indeed, your Lord is Merciful and Loving.' However, since this rationale for his command is also a form of praising God, and it has already been confirmed that He is the Lord of the people, Shuʿayb attributes God to himself this time. And, in doing so, he expresses the meaning: 'your Lord and my Lord is merciful and loving.'

However, by attributing God to himself, Shuʿayb also conveys the fact that this statement comes from His own knowledge and experience, which supports the truthfulness of the claim that God is Merciful and Loving. It is as if to say: 'And how can He be otherwise? For he is my Lord, and I know Him by these two attributes.'

Al-Wadūd is one of the divine names, and it is derived from the Arabic word *wudd*, meaning 'love.' However, *wudd* denotes a special kind of love: one that manifests itself visibly in actions such as affection, continuous communication, and kindness. As it is stated in the Qurʾanic verse: *And of His signs is that He created for you mates from your own selves that you may take comfort in them, and He ordained affection and mercy between you* (30:21).

For God loves His servants, and the traces of His love are made apparent through the abundant blessings He bestows upon them: " *If you enumerate Allah's blessings, you will not be able to count them* (14:34). Therefore, He, the Most High, is indeed *al-Wadūd* towards them.

قَالُوا يَا شُعَيْبُ مَا نَفْقَهُ كَثِيرًا مِمَّا تَقُولُ وَإِنَّا لَنَرَاكَ فِينَا ضَعِيفًا ۖ وَلَوْلَا رَهْطُكَ لَرَجَمْنَاكَ ۖ وَمَا أَنْتَ عَلَيْنَا بِعَزِيزٍ ﴿٩١﴾

(11:91) *They said, 'O Shuʿayb, we do not comprehend* (mā nafqahu) *much of what you say. Indeed we see you are weak amongst us, and were it not for your tribe* (rahṭu-ka)*, we would have stoned you* (la-rajamnā-ka)*, and you are not venerable to us.'*

Fiqh (from whence the verb *nafqahu* is derived) is deeper and more powerful in meaning than 'understanding' (*fahm*). *Raḥṭ* denotes a man's clan or people—some have said it refers to a group of between 3 and 7 or 10. If this is the case, then the use of the term *raḥṭ* here is supposed to call attention to their relative weakness and paucity of numbers. *Rajm* means to stone someone.

Therefore, when the Prophet Shuʿayb debated with his people and defeated them with his arguments, they found no way to respond other than to cut him off without offering any counter argument. They told him:

Firstly, much of what he said was incomprehensible to them, meaning his speech had no effect. This was their indirect way of saying that his words were pointless.

Then, they followed up by saying, '*Indeed we see you are weak amongst us*', meaning, they did not understand his words, nor did they consider him sufficiently influential to warrant them putting in the effort to understand his speech or the care to try and accept it. They saw him as a weak figure among them, someone whose words and actions were not significant and could be safely ignored.

Then, they threatened him by saying, '*and were it not for your tribe, we would have stoned you*.' Meaning: if it was not for this small group of people who were his relatives, they would have stoned him, but they had to consider their relationship with him. This reference to his small family implies that had they wanted to kill him, they could have done so without worrying about his relatives' retaliation. Therefore, their restraint from

killing him was out of the respect and honour they held for his family.

They further emphasized their point by stating, '*and you are not venerable to us*' reinforcing their previous statement. They were saying that he was not powerful or influential enough to deter them from wanting to do him harm, and that the only thing preventing them was the special consideration they had for his family. In conclusion, their words were intended to belittle Shu'ayb and show how little regard they had for him and his message, only refraining from harming him out of consideration for his relatives.

قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ أَرَهْطِي أَعَزُّ عَلَيْكُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَاتَّخَذْتُمُوهُ وَرَاءَكُمْ ظِهْرِيًّا ۖ
إِنَّ رَبِّي بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ مُحِيطٌ ﴿٩٢﴾

(11:92) *He said, 'O my people! Is my tribe more venerable in your sight than Allah, to whom you pay no regard* (wa ittakhadhtumū-hu warā' ẓihriyyan)*? Indeed my Lord comprehends whatever you do.*

Ẓihrī means something that is behind one's back, and is thus neglected or forgotten about. *Ittakhadhu-hu warā'a-hu ẓihriyyan* (literally, 'to put it behind one's back') means to treat something as though it was of no importance and not mention it.

This is Shu'ayb's response to their statement, '*and were it not for your tribe, we would have stoned you*' (11:91). In other words: 'How can you respect my tribe and consider them important, without showing the same respect to God, whom I am calling you towards on behalf of? Is my tribe more worthy of respect in your eyes than God? You have forgotten God entirely, which is not right for you to do, because my Lord encompasses everything thing you do in totality, in existence, knowledge, and power.' The verse criticizes Shu'ayb's people for their foolish ideas, just as they had previously disparaged Shu'ayb for his lowly status.

وَيَا قَوْمِ اعْمَلُوا عَلَىٰ مَكَانَتِكُمْ إِنِّي عَامِلٌ ۖ سَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ مَنْ يَأْتِيهِ
عَذَابٌ يُخْزِيهِ وَمَنْ هُوَ كَاذِبٌ ۖ وَارْتَقِبُوا إِنِّي مَعَكُمْ رَقِيبٌ ﴿٩٣﴾

(11:93) *O my people! Act according to your ability* (makānatikum)*; I too am acting. Soon you will know who will be overtaken*

by a punishment that will disgrace him, and who is a liar. So be on the watch; I too will be watching along with you.'

In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, al-Ṭabrisī writes:

> '*Makāna* refers to the state in which one is able to undertake some act (*yatamakkan bi-hā min ʿamal*). It indicates a strong ability to do something, as when one says *tamakkana min kadhā* ('he is capable of this'), meaning that he has the strength to accomplish it.'

This is a severe threat from Shuʿayb to his people. He is confident in what he says without any worry or hesitation due to their disbelief in and rebellion against his message. So, he says they should act according to their utmost strength and ability. That they have their deeds and he has his. And that a humiliating punishment will soon catch them unawares, and at that time, they will know who will be afflicted with the punishment. Is it him or them? They will know who the liar is. So let them wait, for God is watching them closely and never leaves them.

وَلَمَّا جَاءَ أَمْرُنَا نَجَّيْنَا شُعَيْبًا وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَعَهُ بِرَحْمَةٍ مِنَّا وَأَخَذَتِ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا الصَّيْحَةُ فَأَصْبَحُوا فِي دِيَارِهِمْ جَاثِمِينَ ﴿٩٤﴾

(11:94) ***And when Our edict came, We delivered Shuʿayb and the faithful who were with him by a mercy from Us. And the Cry seized those who were wrongdoers, whereat they lay lifeless prostrate in their homes ...***

The meaning of the verse has already been explained.

كَأَنْ لَمْ يَغْنَوْا فِيهَا ۗ أَلَا بُعْدًا لِمَدْيَنَ كَمَا بَعِدَتْ ثَمُودُ ﴿٩٥﴾

(11:95) ***... as if they had never lived there*** (ka-an lam yaghnaw fī-hā). ***Look! Away with Midian!—just as Thamud was done away with!***

When used in conjunction with a place, the verb *ghanī* (from whence *yaghnaw* is derived) means to dwell therein.

Look! Away with Midian!—just as Thamud was done away with!: This shows that they were cursed just as Thamud was cursed, and some

explanation of this has been provided in our commentary on earlier stories.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, we read: 'God sent Shuʿayb to Midian—a village on the way to Syria—but they did not believe in him.'

(2) In *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, it is narrated by Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. ʿĪsā, from some of his associates, from Imām al-Ṣādiq about God's saying, '*Indeed I see that you are faring well*' (11:84): 'their costs were low.'

(3) It is also narrated by Muḥammad b. al-Fuḍayl from al-Riḍā: 'I asked him about awaiting the relief (*intiẓār al-faraj*). He told me: "Do you not know that awaiting the relief is part of the relief?" Then he said, "Surely God says, *So be on the watch; I too will be watching along with you.*"' (11:93)

Author's comment: His saying 'Do you not know ...?' means 'You do not know,' and this is a colloquialism.

(4) In *Maʿānī al-akhbār*, it is narrated by ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Faḍl al-Hāshimī that he asked Imām al-Ṣādiq about the verses, *and my success lies only with Allah* (11:88) and *If Allah helps you, no one can overcome you, but if He forsakes you, who will help you after Him?* (3:160). He said: 'When the servant does what God Almighty commanded of obedience, his actions are in accordance with God's command, and the servant is then called successful. And when the servant intends to indulge in any of God's sins, and God Almighty stands between him and that sin and he leaves it, then his leaving it is due to God's grace. But when he is left alone with sin and nothing comes between him and it until he accomplishes it, he has been forsaken and not helped or guided.'

Author's comment: His explanation means that God's granting of success to and forsaking His servants are among His attributes of action (*ṣifāt al-fiʿl*). When God grants success to His servant, this means he orders the causes so that they lead the servant to perform righteous work or preventing the existence of those causes that assist him in sinning. And forsaking the servant is the opposite of that. So, a servant's success is associated with causes as it is the result of the harmony created between them and is characterized by it. And the description of the servant as 'successful' is a

description of him with the state of the object of God's action.

(5) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, al-Suyūṭī cites Abū Nuʿaym, who reports from ʿAlī: 'I said: "O Messenger of God advise me!" He said: "Say: 'My Lord is God,' then remain steadfast." I said: "My Lord is God and my success is only through God, upon Him I rely and to Him I turn." He said: "May you enjoy your knowledge, O Abū al-Ḥasan, for you have drunk deeply of knowledge and drawn of it abundantly."'

Author's comment: I have previously discussed some the significance of the lattermost statement.

(6) In the same source, al-Suyūṭī narrates from al-Wāḥidī and Ibn ʿAsākir from Shaddād b. Aws, who said: 'The Messenger of God said: "Shuʿayb wept out of love for God until he went blind, then God restored his sight, and God revealed to him: 'O Shuʿayb, what is this weeping? Is it out of longing for Paradise or fear of Hell?' He said: No, but I have recognized your love in my heart, so when I look upon you, I don't care what you do with me. So, God revealed to him: 'O Shuʿayb, if that is true, congratulations on meeting Me, O Shuʿayb, it is for this reason that I made Moses son of Amram your servant.'"'

Author's comment: What is meant by Shuʿayb 'looking' upon God here is with his spiritual gaze, not the physical one that would imply God's corporeality, which He is transcendent above. This has been previously clarified in the interpretation of the verse: *When Moses arrived at Our tryst* (7:143).

(7) In the same source, Abū al-Shaykh reports from ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib that he delivered a sermon and recited the verse about Shuʿayb: '*Indeed we see you are weak amongst us*' (Al-A'raf, 7:91) He said: 'He was blind, so they considered him weak.' '*and were it not for your tribe, we would have stoned you*.' 'Alī said: 'By God, there is no god except Him, they did not fear the Majesty of their Lord, they only feared their tribe.'

On the Story of Shuʿayb

In the Qur'an:

Shuʿayb was the third of the Arab prophets whose names are mentioned

in the Qur'an. They are: Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Shuʿayb, and Muḥammad. God mentioned parts of Shuʿayb's story in the chapters *al-Aʿrāf, Hūd, al-Shuʿarā', al-Qaṣaṣ,* and *al-ʿAnkabut*.

Shuʿayb was of the people of Midian—a city on the route to the Levant from the Arabian Peninsula—and he was a contemporary of Moses. He gave Moses one of his daughters in marriage in return for his service for eight or ten years (28:27). So, Moses served him for ten years and then left with his family to Egypt.

Shuʿayb's people, the people of Midian, worshipped idols. They lived comfortably, enjoying security, prosperity, fertility, and low costs. However, corruption and fraudulent dealing spread among them (11:84 and other verses). As a result, God sent Shuʿayb to them and commanded him to stop them from worshipping idols, spreading corruption on earth, and cheating in weights and measures. He invited them to obey what God had commanded, and warned them of an imminent divine punishment, and reminded them of what happened to the peoples of Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, and Lot before them.

However, in spite of his efforts to persuade them and his continuous warnings, Shuʿayb's people only became more defiant, disbelieving, and sinful (as mentioned in *al-Aʿrāf, Hūd*, and other chapters). Only a small number of them ultimately believed in him. They began to harm and ridicule the believers and threatened to persecute them if they continued to follow Shuʿayb. His people would lie in wait on every path, threatening and hindering those who believed in Him from the way of God and seeking to make it crooked (7:86).

Eventually, Shuʿayb's people began to accuse him of being bewitched or a charlatan (26:185, 186) and threatened him with stoning, and they threatened him and those who believed in him with expulsion from their village or to compel them to return to their old faith (7:88). They continued doing this until Shuʿayb lost all hope of their belief, so he left them and themselves to their own devices (11:93). He prayed to God for victory, saying: '*Our Lord! Judge justly between us and our people, and You are the best of judges!*' (7:89)

So, God sent upon them the punishment of the day of the overshadowing cloud (26:189). They had been mocking him, saying, 'Call down upon us fragments from the sky if you are truthful', and they were taken by

the blast (11:94) and the earthquake (7:91, 29:37), so they were left in their homes, prostrate. Shuʿayb and the believers who were with him were saved (11:94). So he turned away from them and said: "*'O my people! Certainly I communicated to you the messages of my Lord, and I was your well-wisher. So how should I grieve for a faithless lot?'* (7:93).

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Shuʿayb's Moral Character:

Shuʿayb was one of the divine prophets whom God has praised in the Qurʾan. He also has recounted much of what Shuʿayb said to his people, especially in the chapters *al-Aʿrāf, Hūd, and al-Shuʿarā*, and what he conveyed to them of profound knowledge, divine teachings, and excellent manners with God and with people.

Shuʿayb called himself '*a trusted messenger*' (26:178), a reformer (11:88), and one of the righteous (26:27). God recounted all of this from him approvingly. And Moses, the son of Amran, served him for about ten years.

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In the Torah:

The Torah does not recount his story with his people, but it refers to him in its account of Moses killing the Egyptian and his escape from Egypt to Midian in the Book of Exodus. It named him Reuel, the priest of Midian (Exodus 2:18), as Jethro (Exodus 3:1), and as Hobab (Numbers 10:29)

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Verses 96–99

This section of verses refers to the story of Moses, who spoke directly with God. He is the most mentioned prophet in the Qur'an, his name being invoked in one hundred and thirty-three places across approximately thirty-two chapters. The Qur'an takes great care to detail his story more than any other messenger, but God has summarized it beautifully in this chapter, being content to suffice with a general allusion to it.

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا مُوسَىٰ بِآيَاتِنَا وَسُلْطَانٍ مُبِينٍ ﴿٩٦﴾

(11:96) *Certainly We sent Moses with Our signs* (bi ayātinā) *and a manifest authority ...*

The *bi* in *bi ayātinā* signifies accompaniment, meaning: 'We sent Moses accompanied by Our signs.' This is because of the prophets and messengers sent by God and supported by miraculous signs, there are those who were given the miraculous sign as their people demanded, like Ṣāliḥ, who God supported with the sign of the She-camel. Then, there are those who were supported with a miraculous sign at the beginning of their missions like Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad. For example, God said to Moses *Go ahead, you and your brother, with My signs* (20:42), and He said about Jesus *a messenger to the Children of Israel, 'I have certainly brought you a sign from your Lord'* (3:49), and He said about Muḥammad: *It is He who has sent His Messenger with the guidance* (61:9)—'guidance' in this last verse refers to the Qur'an as evidenced by His saying, *This is the Book, there is no doubt in it, a guidance to the Godwary* (2:2). God also said: *and follow the light that has been sent down with him* (7:157).

Moses was sent with signs (*āyāt*) and a manifest authority (*sulṭān mubīn*), and it appears that the intended meaning of these signs are the miraculous events that occurred by his hand, as indicated by the context of his stories in the Qur'an.

As for 'authority', it denotes the decisive proofs and logical arguments that overcome people's minds and intellects. This includes both miraculous signs and the rational arguments, and in the context of the present

verse, mentioning 'authority' after signs is akin to coupling the general with the specific.

It's not far-fetched that sending Moses with 'manifest authority' meant that God gave him control over the circumstances that unfolded between him and the Pharaoh's household, that tyrant that no messenger except Moses had been tested with. However, God Almighty made Moses triumph until He ultimately drowned Pharaoh and his armies and saved the Children of Israel by his hand. This meaning is alluded to by the verse, *The two of them said, 'Our Lord! We are indeed afraid that he will forestall us or will overstep the bounds.' He said, 'Do not be afraid, for I will be with the two of you, hearing and seeing* (20:45–46) and His saying to Moses '*'Do not be afraid. Indeed you will have the upper hand.'* (20:68).

These verses and their counterparts provide clear evidence that Moses's mission was not limited to his people from the Children of Israel, but it included them and others as well.

إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ وَمَلَإِيهِ فَاتَّبَعُوا أَمْرَ فِرْعَوْنَ ۖ وَمَا أَمْرُ فِرْعَوْنَ بِرَشِيدٍ ﴿٩٧﴾

(11:97) *... to Pharaoh and his elite, but they followed Pharaoh's dictates, and Pharaoh's dictates were not right-minded.*

God highlights that this message was specifically directed to Pharaoh and his establishment—who are the elites and leaders of the people, who fill their hearts with awe—rather than all of the people. This may be a hint that the masses were only followers with no opinion of their own except in accordance with whatever their leaders decreed for them.

... but they followed Pharaoh's dictates: The apparent meaning of 'dictates' here is more general than just words or actions. This is illustrated in the verse in which God said of him, *Pharaoh said, 'I just point out to you what I see to be advisable for you, and I guide you only to the way of rectitude* (sabīl al-rashād)*.'* (40:29), which also refers the way and method that he adopted and commanded. The verse correlates with Pharaoh's statement, and it appears that God rebutted him by saying, *and Pharaoh's dictates were not right-minded* (rashīd).

This is further emphasized by the fact that the adjective *rashīd* ('right-minded') is a cognate of *rashshād* ('rectitude'), both of which are derived from *rushd*, which is the opposite of *ghayy* ('error' or 'perversity'). In other

words, Pharaoh's dictates were neither guided by nor led to the truth, rather they were marked by error and ignorance. Some say *rashīd* here means the one who guides. In the phrase, *and Pharaoh's dictates were not right-minded*, God explicitly uses Pharaoh's name instead of the pronoun 'his', when it would have made sense to say 'his dictates'. Perhaps the reason for this is to imply his own lack of rectitude, something that can't be inferred from using a pronoun.

يَقْدُمُ قَوْمَهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ فَأَوْرَدَهُمُ النَّارَ ۖ وَبِئْسَ الْوِرْدُ الْمَوْرُودُ ﴿٩٨﴾

(11:98) *On the Day of Resurrection he will lead his people and conduct them into the Fire: an evil goal for the incoming!*

This verse means Pharaoh will lead his people into Hell because they followed his command in this world and thus he became their leader—one of the leaders of misguidance that God refers to in the verse: *We made them leaders who invite to the Fire* (28:41).

... and conduct them into the Fire (fa awrada-hum al-nār) is the outcome of what was previously stated, in other words, he will lead them into the fire. The use of the past tense verb *awrada* (instead of the future-tense) is to affirm that this is something that will definitely come to pass.

Some might argue that this follows from His saying: *but they followed Pharaoh's dictates*, meaning they followed him, and their following him led them to the Fire. They argue that this understanding is supported by His saying: *while a terrible punishment besieged Pharaoh's clan: The Fire, to which they are exposed morning and evening. And on the day when the Hour sets in Pharaoh's clan will enter the severest punishment* (40:45–46), as the verses indicate that their punishment began at the time of their death, before the Day of Judgement. However, the verses clearly contradict this reading, as they describe their punishment before the Day of Judgement with the words *morning and evening,* and on the Day of Judgement with the phrase *enter the severest punishment*, which is Hellfire.

... an evil goal for the incoming! (wa bi'sa al-wird al-mawrūd)—the word *wird* refers to water which thirsty creatures, whether animal or human, seek out. Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī says in his *Mufradāt*: 'The term *wurūd* originally meant "to seek water", then it came to be used in other contexts. The transitive form *awrada* means "to lead to water." See the verse, *When*

he arrived at the well of Midian ... (28:23). *Wird* refers to the water that is sought out.'

Based on the above explanation, we can discern a subtle metaphor in the language of this passage. In it, God compares the ultimate goal a person seeks in life and with the effort a thirsty person expends to seek water. The happiness that a person seeks through his actions is like the water he seeks to quench his thirst. The ultimate happiness of a person is the pleasure of God and paradise. However, when the people of Egypt went astray by following the command of Pharaoh and strayed from the path of true happiness, their ultimate goal changed to the Fire. So, the Fire became the watering hole they sought, and what a terrible place to seek! This is because the place they sought was originally supposed to quench their burning thirst and satisfy their parched stomachs with sweet water from a pleasing source. But when the place they sought changes into the torment of the Fire, what a terrible place that is to seek!

وَأُتْبِعُوا فِي هَٰذِهِ لَعْنَةً وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ ۚ بِئْسَ الرِّفْدُ الْمَرْفُودُ ﴿٩٩﴾

(11:99) *They were pursued by a curse in this and, on the Day of Resurrection, evil is the award conferred!*

This means they followed the command of Pharaoh and therefore, a curse from God followed them in this world, which included distancing them from His mercy and expelling them from His proximity. The manifestation of this curse that followed them in this world was the fact that they drowned, or it was the divine decree that they would be driven out of His mercy, which was written in the record of their deeds, and among its outcomes was their drowning and punishment in the afterlife.

... on the Day of Resurrection, evil is the award conferred! (**bi's al-rifd al-marfūd**)*: Rifd* refers to a gift, and its original meaning is 'help' or 'support'. A gift is called a *rifd* or *marfūd* ('a thing conferred') because it aids the recipient in the fulfilment of his needs. The meaning is: 'what a terrible gift they will be given on the Day of Judgement, which is the Fire where they will prostrate.' This verse is similar to His saying elsewhere: *We made a curse pursue them in this world, and on the Day of Resurrection they will be among the disfigured* (28:42).

... on the Day of Resurrection might be understood as an adverb, in

which case the phrase would relate to His saying: *They were pursued* ... or His saying: *a curse*, in which case it parallels His saying: *in this*. This would render the meaning: 'God has pursued them with a curse in this world and in the hereafter, or God has pursued them with a curse in this world and in the hereafter—what a wretched gift to be given!' Where the gift is either the curse that pursued them, or the state of being pursued by a curse.

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(Chapter 11 continues in English volume 21)

The end. All praise be to Almighty God.

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About the Author

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The late Islamic scholar, thinker, and philosopher, ʿAllāmah al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī came from the celebrated Ṭabāṭabāʾī family of Tabriz. For the last three centuries, this family has produced generation after generation of renowned religious scholars in Azerbaijan (Iran). They are descendants of the second Imām, al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī (peace be on both of them). The clan is also referred to with the title, al-Qāḍī.

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was the son of al-Sayyid Muḥammad b. al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī. ʿAllāmah was born in Tabriz on 29 Dhū al-Ḥijjah 1321/17 March 1904. His father died in 1330 (1912). The orphaned child grew up in Tabriz, and after completing his religious education there, around 1341 (1923), he went to Najaf (Iraq), the most important center of Shia religious learning.

In Najaf, he began his higher studies with such illustrious scholars as Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn Nāʾīnī al-Gharawī (1277–1355/1860 or 1861–1936), the son of Shaykh al-Islām ʿAbd al-Raḥīm, and Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Gharawī al-Iṣfahānī (1296–1361/1878–1942), the son of al-Ḥājj Muḥammad Ḥasan, Muʿīn al-Tujjār.

These two were among the most prominent scholars in the Shia world. They were among the most prominent scholars not only in the fields of Shia jurisprudence and principles of jurisprudence, but in all Islamic subjects. Their opinions and theories are still followed today. Each founded his own school of thought and trained thousands of Shia scholars and jurists; and all the *marājiʿ al-taqlīd*[1] of the Shia world, to this day, are their students. Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Gharawī al-Iṣfahānī was a philosopher, unsurpassed in his time; a man of literature; and a poet in Arabic and Persian; he was a genius whose achievements made others look up to him as their ideal. Shaykh Nāʾīnī, with his bold opinions and decrees in the political and social life of the Muslim *umma*, has carved for

1 The highest authorities of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) whose rulings are followed by others. [Pub.]

himself a niche in history.

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was much influenced by these two teachers, particularly by al-Iṣfahānī, in the development of his thought and knowledge. A third influence was that of al-Sayyid Abū al-Qāsim Jaʿfar Khwānsārī (1313– 80/1895 or 1896–1961), the son of al-Sayyid Muḥammad al-Moseswī, known as "the mathematician." ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was proud to have studied mathematics with him, and also wrote a book on higher mathematics, in which he applied some special theories of his teacher.

ʿAllāmah studied philosophy and metaphysics from al-Sayyid Ḥusayn al-Ḥusaynī Bādkūbahʾī; the latter was a student of al-Sayyid Riḍā, who studied with al-Sayyid Moses, a well-known teacher of philosophy and related subjects. In the fields of ethics and spirituality, ʿAllāmah received his training from his relatives, al-Sayyid ʿAlī al-Qāḍī (1285–1366/1869–1947), a well-known scholar who established a school of spiritual and ethical training which still flourishes today.

All these influences combined to create in ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī a well-balanced academic and spiritual personality. He was a well-respected authority on religious subjects of jurisprudence and its fundamentals; a philosopher of independent views and new theories; and an inspired model of ethical and spiritual perfection. He not only taught morality, but also lived it. Yet it is also correct to state that his scholarship was overshadowed by his fame and prestige as a philosopher and a spiritual man.

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī returned to Tabriz in 1353/1934, where he was welcomed as a religious scholar. There he spent his time teaching higher philosophy to willing disciples—but it was a small place for his talents. In 1364/1945 he migrated to Qum, the most important center of religious education in Iran. In Qum, he remained engaged in imparting the knowledge of ethics, philosophy, and the exegesis of the Qur'an to those students who had already attained a high level of erudition. There he remained until his death on Sunday, 18 Muḥarram 1402/15 November 1981. May God bestow His mercy on him. Amen.

Many religious leaders of the present generation were and are among his students and disciples, the most famous being the late Murtaḍā Muṭahharī (1338–99/1920–79).

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī's fame rests on his academic works—the most important being his great exegesis of the Qur'an, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr*

al-Qur'ān. It is said to be the foundation stone of the academic prestige which ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was accorded in the Muslim world.

Among his other works is *Uṣūl-i falsafah va ravish-i riʾalism* [Practical and Philosophical Principles of Realism]. This book is a comparative study of Islamic philosophy and various modern anti-Islamic schools of thoughts, especially Marxism. His disciple, the late Murtaḍā Muṭahharī, annotated this work, thus making it easily accessible to the average man.

A third book, *Shiʿa dār Islām*, was first published in Persian; later it was published in English with the title, *Shiʾite Islam.* The ʿAllāmah wrote this book on the request of Professor Kenneth Morgan of Colgate University, to introduce Shiism to the West.

However, it is his *tafsīr, al-Mīzān* (published in 20 volumes in Arabic) which presents the true picture of the author's academic style and his way of thinking. In the preface to volume 1, the author outlines his plan, to explain the Qur'an with the help of the Qur'an itself. This he faithfully does, all the way through to the end of the *tafsīr*.

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